SORRY, 'PAC! THE 33 MOST OVERRATED THINGS IN MUSIC

BLENDER

Pussycat Dolls

THE **NEW ALBUM** IS HOT–
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(PG. 58)

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THE KILLERS
NAS

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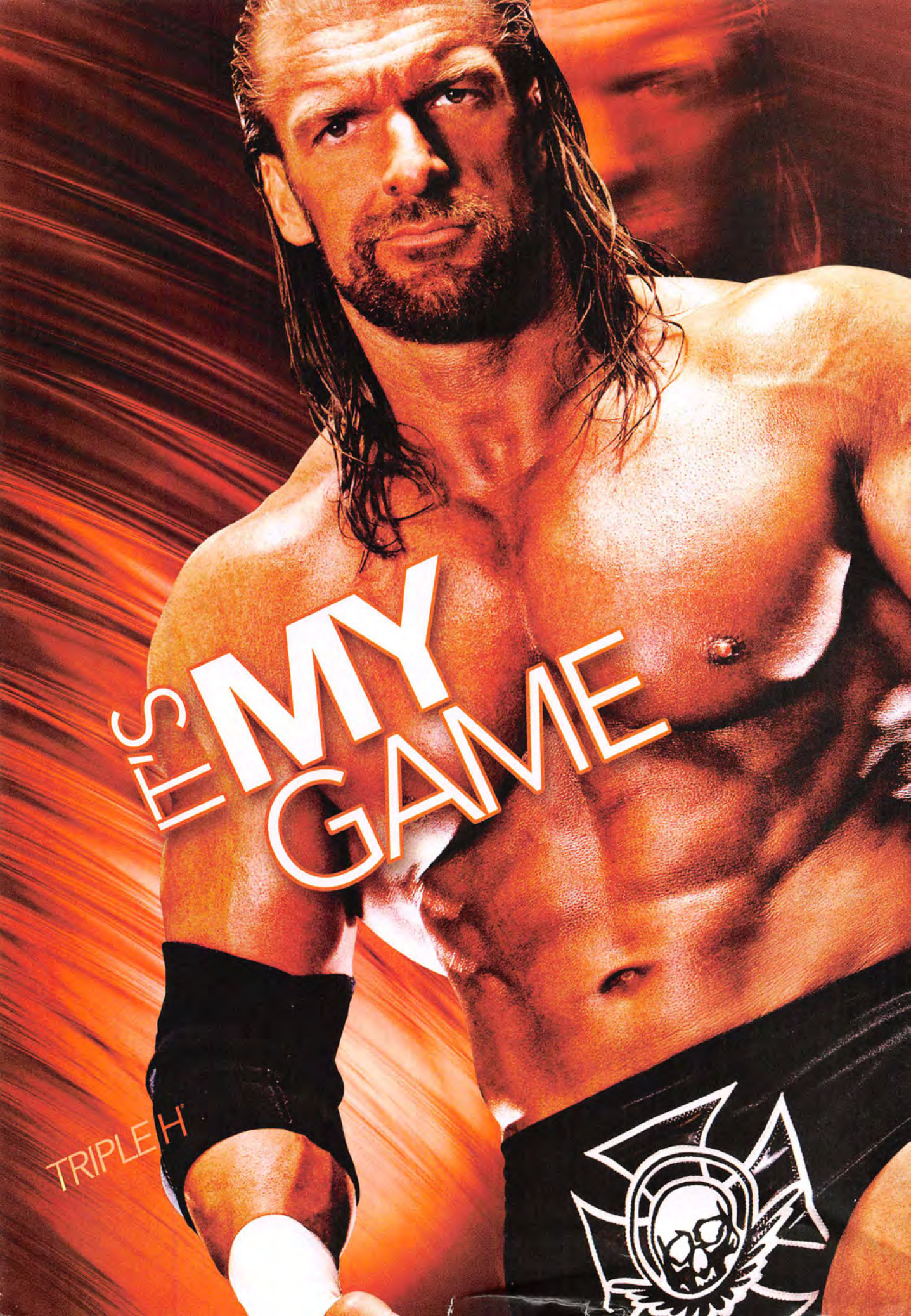
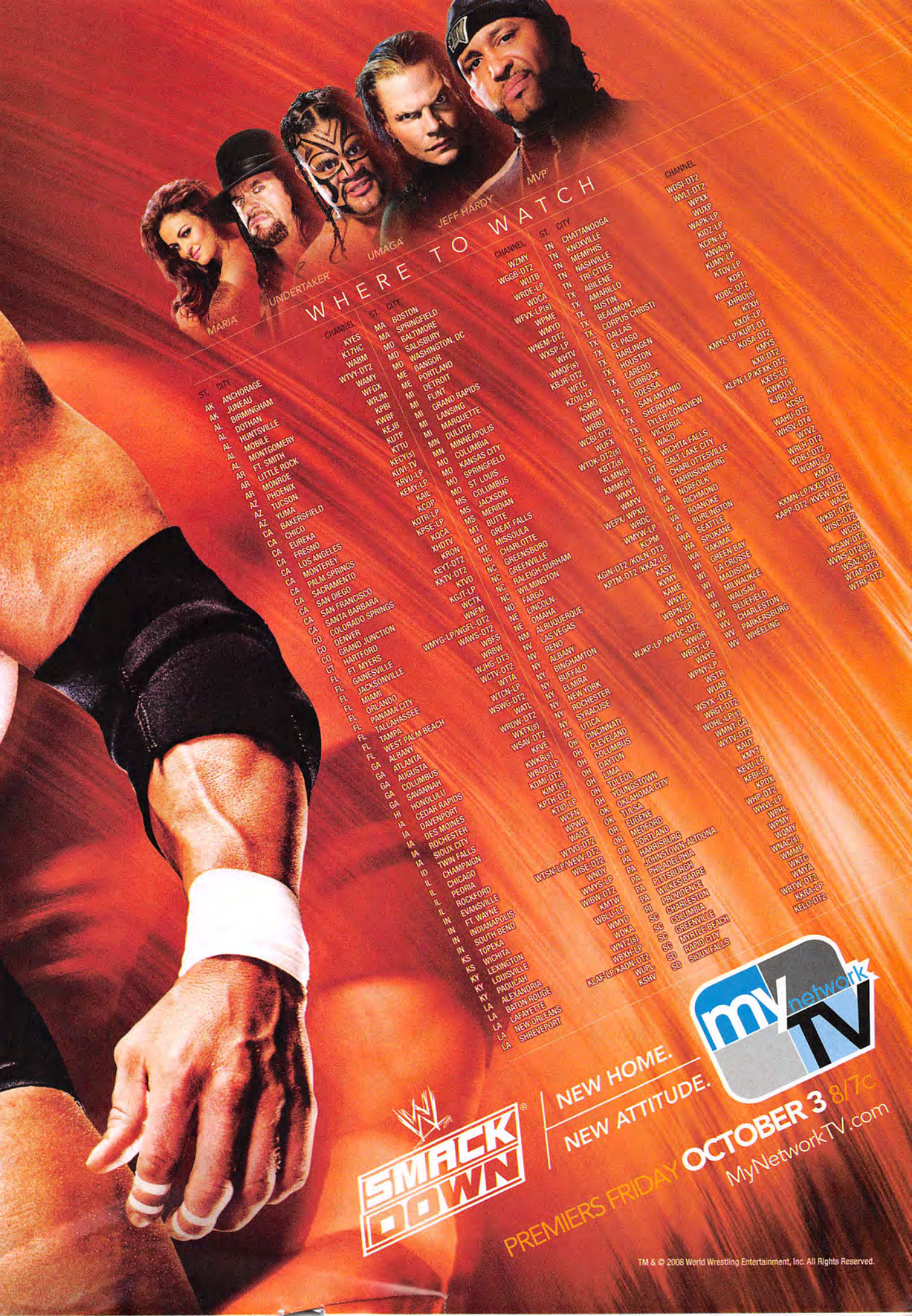
jorge alderete mexico city 1/1800 Dr. ALDERETE!
Jorge Alderete is the first selected artist on our hunt for 1,800 Essential artists that make up the new 1800 Tequila Campaign. Born in Argentina, now living in Mexico City, Jorge is a pop-illustrator who uses trash culture, such as 50's science fiction films, wrestling and surf music imagery in his psychotronic illustrations. Alderete co-owns a record label and curates a cultural center in Mexico. Log onto 1800tequila.com and find out how you can compete to be the next 1800 Essential Artist.


IT'S MY GAME
TRIPLE H


MARIA
UNDERTAKER
UMAGA
JEFF HARDY
MVP
WHERE TO WATCH
ST. CITY CHANNEL
AK ANCHORAGE
AK JUNEAU
AL BIRMINGHAM
AL DOTHAN
AL HUNTSVILLE
AL MOBILE
AL MONTGOMERY
AR FT. SMITH
AR LITTLE ROCK
AR MONROE
AZ PHOENIX
AZ TUCSON
AZ YUMA
CA BAKERSFIELD
CA CHICO
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CA LOS ANGELES
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IN EVANSVILLE
IN FT. WAYNE
IN INDIANAPOLIS
IN SOUTH BEND
KS TOPEKA
KS WICHITA
KY LEXINGTON
KY LOUISVILLE
KY PADUCAH
LA ALEXANDRIA
LA BATON ROUGE
LA LAFAYETTE
LA NEW ORLEANS
LA SHREVEPORT
ST. CITY CHANNEL
MA BOSTON KYES
MA SPRINGFIELD K17HC
MD BALTIMORE WABM
MD SALISBURY WTVJ-DT2
MD WASHINGTON, DC WAMY
ME BANGOR WFGX
ME PORTLAND WRJM
MI DETROIT KPBI
MI FLINT KWBF
MI GRAND RAPIDS KEJB
MI LANSING KUTP
MI MARQUETTE KTTU
MI DULUTH KECY(s)
MN MINNEAPOLIS KUVI-TV
MN COLUMBIA KRVU-LP
MO KANSAS CITY KEMY-LP
MO SPRINGFIELD KAIL
MO ST. LOUIS KCOP
MO COLUMBUS KOTR-LP
MS JACKSON KPSE-LP
MS MERIDIAN KOCA
MT BUTTE XHDTV
MT GREAT FALLS KRON
MT MISSOULA KEYT-DT2
NC CHARLOTTE KKTV-DT2
NC GREENSBORO KTVD
NC GREENVILLE KGJT-LP
NC RALEIGH-DURHAM WCTX
NC WILMINGTON WNEM
ND FARGO WMYG-LP/WGFL-DT2
NE LINCOLN WAWS-DT2
NE OMAHA WBFS
NM ALBUQUERQUE WRBW
NV LAS VEGAS WJHG-DT3
NV RENO WCTV-DT2
NY ALBANY WTTA
NY BINGHAMTON WTON-LP
NY BUFFALO WSWG-DT2
NY ELMIRA WATL
NY NEW YORK WRDW-DT2
NY ROCHESTER WXTX(s)
NY SYRACUSE WSAV-DT2
NY UTICA KFVE
OH CINCINNATI KNXR(s)
OH CLEVELAND WBOD-LP
OH COLUMBUS KDNL-DT2
OH DAYTON KIMT(s)
OH LIMA KPTH-DT2
OH TOLEDO KTIO-LP
OH YOUNGSTOWN WCFN
OK OKLAHOMA CITY WPWR
OK TULSA WAOE
OR EUGENE WTVO-DT2
OR MEDFORD WTSH-LP/WEVV-DT2
OR PORTLAND WISE-DT2
PA HARRISBURG WNDY
PA JOHNSTOWN-ALTOONA WMYS-LP
PA PHILADELPHIA WIBW-DT2
PA PITTSBURGH KMTW
PA WILKES BARRE WBLU-LP
RI PROVIDENCE WMYO
SC CHARLESTON WDKA
SC COLUMBIA WNTZ(s)
SC GREENVILLE WRXH-LP
SC MYRTLE BEACH KLAF-LP/KADN-DT2
SD RAPID CITY WUFL
SD SIOUX FALLS KSHV
ST. CITY CHANNEL
TN CHATTANOOGA WDSI-DT2
TN KNOXVILLE WVLT-DT2
TN MEMPHIS WPXX
TN NASHVILLE WUXP
TN TRI-CITIES WAPK-LP
TX ABILENE KIDZ-LP
TX AMARILLO KCPN-LP
TX AUSTIN KNVA(s)
TX BEAUMONT KUMY-LP
TX CORPUS CHRISTI KTOV-LP
TX DALLAS KDFI
TX EL PASO KDBC-DT2
TX HARLINGEN XHRIO(s)
TX HOUSTON KTXH
TX LAREDO KXOF-LP
TX LUBBOCK KMYL-LP/KUPT-DT
TX ODESSA KOSA-DT2
TX SAN ANTONIO KMYS
TX SHERMAN KXII-DT2
TX TYLER-LONGVIEW KLPN-LP/KFXK-DT2
TX VICTORIA KXTS-LP
TX WACO KWKT(s)
TX WICHITA FALLS KJBO-LP
UT SALT LAKE CITY KCSG
VA CHARLOTTESVILLE WAHU-DT2
VA HARRISONBURG WHSV-DT4
VA NORFOLK WTVZ
VA RICHMOND WRLH-DT2
VA ROANOKE WDBJ-DT2
VA BURLINGTON WGMU-LP
VT SEATTLE KMYQ
WA SPOKANE KXMN-LP/KXLY-DT2
WA YAKIMA KAPP-DT2/KVEW-DT2
WA GREEN BAY WADY
WI LA CROSSE WKBT-DT2
WI MADISON WISC-DT2
WI MILWAUKEE WCGV
WI WAUSAU WSAW-DT2
WV BLUEFIELD WVNS-DT2(s)
WV CHARLESTON WSAZ-DT2
WV PARKERSBURG WTAP-DT3
WV WHEELING WTRF-DT2
KGIN-DT2/KOLN-DT3
KPTM-DT2/KKAZ-LP
KASY
KVMY
KAME
WNYA
WBPN-LP
WNYO
WJKP-LP/WYDC-DT2
WWOR
WBGT-LP
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WPNY-LP
WSTR
WUAB
WSTX-DT2
WRGT-DT2
WOHL-LP(s)
WMNT-CA
WYTV-DT2
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KMYT
KEVU-LP
KFBI-LP
KPDX
WHP-DT2
WRVE-LP
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COLUMBIA PICTURES AND MANDATE PICTURES PRESENT A DEPTH OF FIELD PRODUCTION MICHAEL CERA "NICK & NORAH'S INFINITE PLAYLIST" KAT DENNINGS ALEXIS DZIENA ARI GRAYNOR AARON YOO AND JAY BARUCHEL MUSIC SUPERVISOR LINDA COHEN MUSIC BY MARK MOTHERSBAUGH CO-PRODUCERS NICOLE BROWN KELLI KONOP EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JOE DRAKE NATHAN KAHANE ADAM BRIGHTMAN PRODUCED BY KERRY KOHANSKY CHRIS WEITZ PAUL WEITZ ANDREW MIANO BASED ON THE NOVEL BY RACHEL COHN & DAVID LEVITHAN SCREENPLAY BY LORENE SCAFARIA DIRECTED BY PETER SOLLETT

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PG-13 PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 13
MATURE THEMATIC MATERIAL INCLUDING TEEN DRINKING, SEXUALITY, LANGUAGE AND CRUDE BEHAVIOR

THIS OCTOBER PRESS PLAY NickAndNorah.com

COLUMBIA PICTURES

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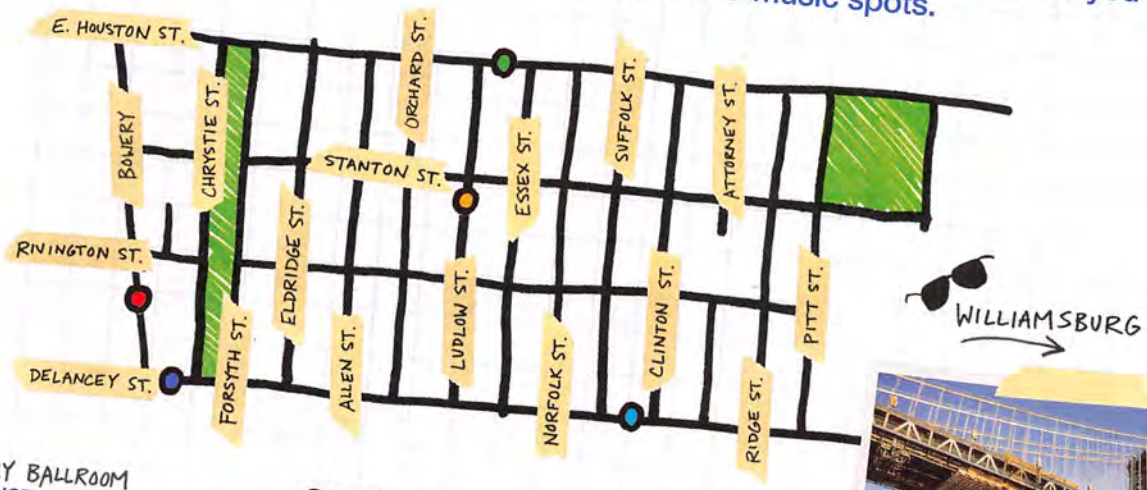
NICK & NORAH'S ALL ACCESS PASS

When the sun goes down on New York's Lower East Side, music fans from all over flock to these venues to see their favorite indie bands. Blender takes you on the essential tour of the neighborhood's finest live-music spots.



BOWERY BALLROOM
6 DELANCEY STREET

Calling all claustrophobics: The spacious Bowery Ballroom is one of the few stages on the Lower East Side that isn't crammed into a space the size of your childhood bedroom.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 EAST HOUSTON

Got a short attention span? The cozy back room at Mercury Lounge features between two and four bands a night, so you'll never get antsy or bored.

CRASH MANSION
199 BOWERY

See the latest underground darlings in this stylish underground space. Get there early to snag a booth by the stage; after the show, there's a nightclub upstairs.

PIANOS
158 LUDLOW

Pianos is where hipsters go to see and be seen. With two levels of performance spaces and a stylish crowd, you're guaranteed great music and great people-watching.

THE DELANCEY
168 DELANCEY

The Delancey is like a theme park (in a good way)—downstairs there's a boudoir-esque stage, the main floor boasts a traditional bar, and upstairs there's a tropical-themed outdoor lounge.

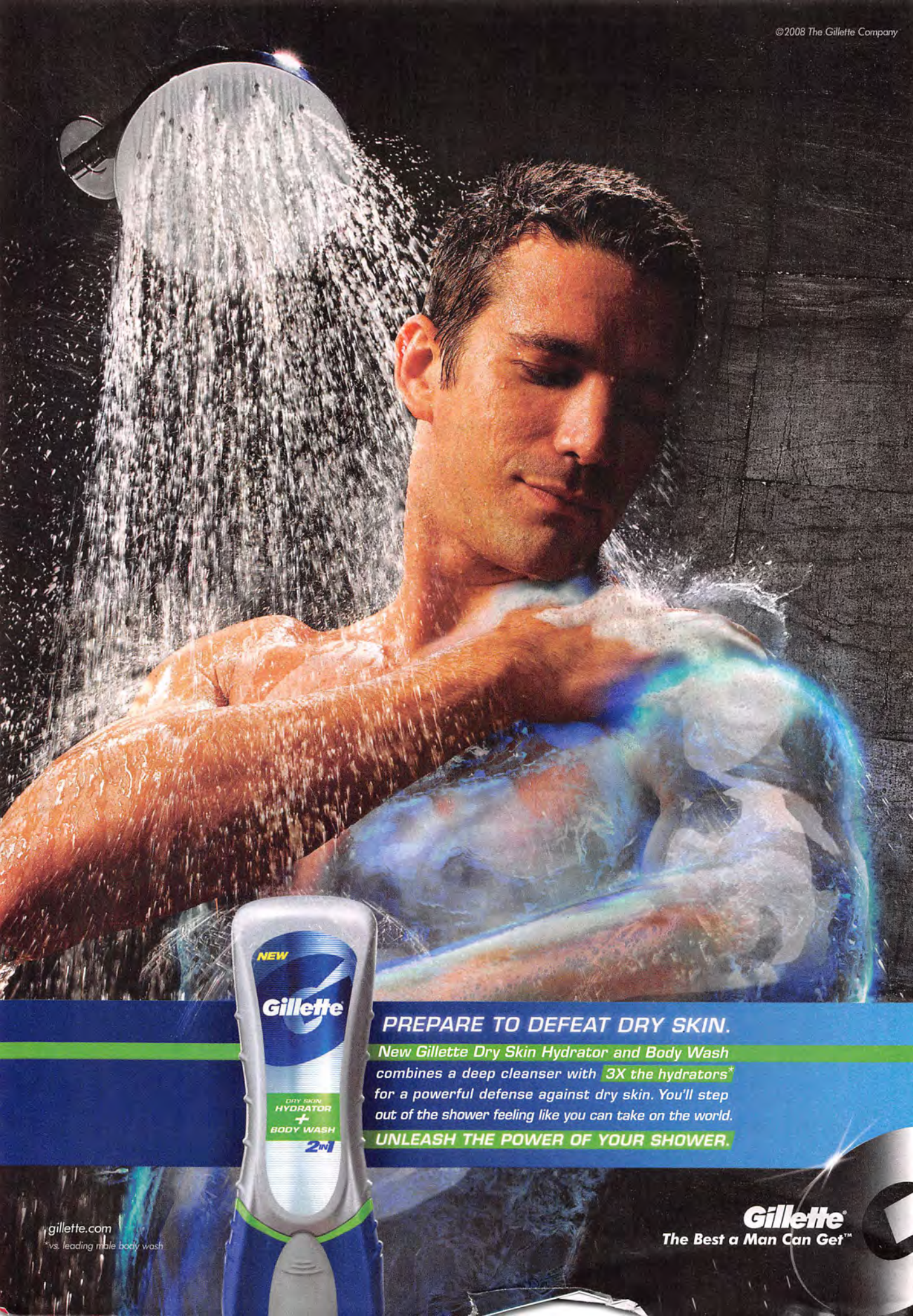
BLENDER THEATER AT GRAMERCY

When you've had enough of sticky floors and obscure streets, hop on the subway and head up to the Blender Theater on 23rd Street. It's easy to find on the city grid, and you're guaranteed a good show and a good drink from one of the venue's three bars.

NICK & NORAH'S INFINITE PLAYLIST

Need some Hollywood inspiration? Check out *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*, a comedy about two strangers, Nick (Michael Cera) and Norah (Kat Dennings), who meet on New York City's indie-rock scene. Their chance encounter leads to an all-night quest to find a legendary band's secret show and ends up becoming an unexpected first date.

In theaters October 3. Go to NickandNorah.com for more info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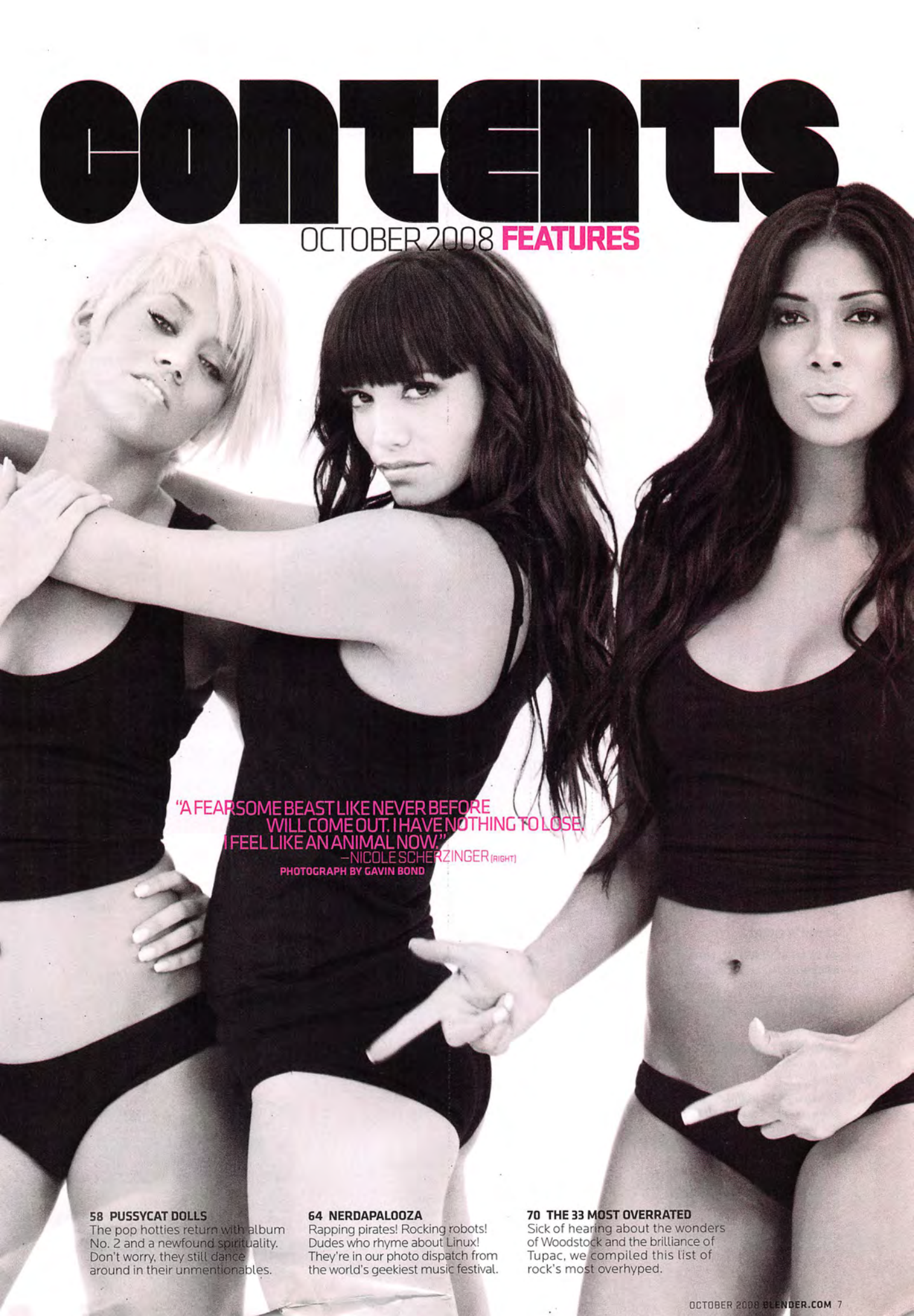

"A FEARSOME BEAST LIKE NEVER BEFORE WILL COME OUT. I HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE. I FEEL LIKE AN ANIMAL NOW"
—NICOLE SCHERZINGER (RIGHT)
PHOTOGRAPH BY GAVIN BOND

58 PUSSYCAT DOLLS
The pop hotties return with album No. 2 and a newfound spirituality. Don't worry, they still dance around in their unmentionables.

64 NERDAPALOOZA
Rapping pirates! Rocking robots! Dudes who rhyme about Linux! They're in our photo dispatch from the world's geekiest music festival.

70 THE 33 MOST OVERRATED
Sick of hearing about the wonders of Woodstock and the brilliance of Tupac, we compiled this list of rock's most overhyped.

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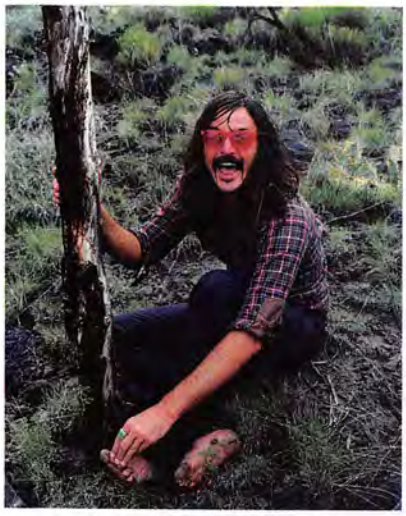
28 ALMOST FAMOUS: KERI HILSON She's helped pen hits for Timbaland and Britney, but now she's fulfilling her true dream: becoming a solo artist.



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30 GREATEST SONGS EVER: "NEED YOU TONIGHT" After a decade together, Aussie rockers INXS decided to get funky. The result: a seductive dance-floor hit tinged with sadness.

34 USEFUL TIPS: BRIGHTBLACK MORNING LIGHT Screw the electric company! The New Mexico–based hippies tell you how to live off the grid.

36 ASK BLENDER This month, learn all about supergroupies and laser machines!

42 TOP 33 CHART

44 DEAR SUPERSTAR: NOEL GALLAGHER The cocksure Oasis songwriter-guitarist answers your questions on cocaine, nonsensical album titles and his untamed unibrow.

51 COLLECT CALL: KINGS OF LEON 168 hours with Nashville's hard-drinking band of brothers

54 STATION TO STATION Our correspondent survives his visit to Bodymore, Murderland (a.k.a. Baltimore), and returns with fantastic tales of art punks gone wild.

96 WHO DOES JOSH TODD THINK HE IS? The Buckcherry frontman reveals the Bonnie Raitt song that makes him cry and admits to having fooled around with another dude.

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84 REISSUES ZZ Top, the Chemical Brothers, the Jacksons, Jay Reatard and more

86 MOVIES *The Brothers Bloom* and *Rachel Getting Married*

88 GAMES *Midnight Club: Los Angeles, Fallout 3, NBA 2K9* and more

ON THE COVER
PUSSYCAT DOLLS
PHOTOGRAPH BY GAVIN BOND. Styling by Jewels for Magnet L.A. Hair by Clyde Haygood for Margaret Maldonado. Frankie Payne for Opus Beauty and Randy Stodghill. Makeup by Troy Jensen for Margaret Maldonado. Mathu Andersen for Margaret Maldonado and Therese Willis. Manicure by Melissa Bozant for Art Mix Beauty. Set design by David Ross for Art Mix Beauty. Tank tops by James Perse. Bras by Calvin Klein. Panties by Calvin Klein, Undrest and American Apparel.

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BRIGHTBLACK MORNING LIGHT: MICHAEL SCHMELLING; DEACON ILLUSTRATION: SIGGI EGGERTSSON AT BIG ACTIVE; LITTLE RICHARD: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; KILLERS: DARREN ANKENMAN; TORRINI: JON BERGMAN. ESTELLE GETTY (COVER SPINE): JIM SMEAL/WIREIMAGE.

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THE BLENDER BIBLE

THE HOLY COMMANDMENTS OF POP CULTURE

AUTUMN DE WILDE/CORBIS OUTLINE.

1 Jenny Lewis "SEE FERNANDO"

WARNER BROS.

From the Rilo Kiley front fox, the fuzz-drenched tale of a dude who's either a) the life of the party, or b) a drug dealer.

2 Pretty Ricky "Knockin' the Boots '08"
Atlantic
Yep, it's a remake of the old H-Town hornyplosion, from the campiest seducers in R&B.

3 One Day as a Lion "Wild International"
Anti-
Rage Against the Machine's Zach de la Rocha makes his solo move ... and we are not angry that it sounds like a stripped-down Rage Against the Machine!

4 Gang Gang Dance "House Jam"
The Social Registry
NYC artso squad makes one bizarre-as-hell four-on-the-floor booty bumper.

5 DJ Khaled feat. Akon, Lil Boosie, Rick Ross, Ace Hood, Trick Daddy and Plies "Out Here Grindin"
We the Best
If any more people come out here to grind, we're gonna need a bigger block.

6 Brightblack Morning Light "Hologram Buffalo"
Matador
A dude named Shineywater sings about the wisdom of teepees over slow-stroked Fender Rhodes gorgeousness—good for the hippies!

7 TV on the Radio "Crying"
Interscope
These Brooklyn noise-poppers are back in fine form: squelchy synth beats, INXS funk riffs and wistful lyrics about coke and riots.

8 Cold War Kids "Something Is Not Right With Me"
Downtown
Long Beach, Cali, indie boys return with a sad story about being the only one of your friends who still uses pay phones.

9 Lloyd "Year of the Lover"
The Inc/Universal Motown
The Jackolyte makes an addendum to the Chinese Zodiac with this humid bedroom ballad.

10 Oasis "The Shock of the Lightning"
Big Brother
The bratty Brit bros are back, mate!

11 Buckcherry "Too Drunk ... "
Eleven Seven/Atlantic
A gleefully retarded celebration of alcohol and impotence that would've been perfect on the *Superbad* soundtrack.

12 Ra Ra Riot "Each Year"
Barsuk
The Syracuse indie-pop outfit uncorks a sunny violin jam with the teensiest hint of melancholy.

13 T-Pain feat. Lil Wayne "Can't Believe It"
Jive
The Auto-Tune impresario falls in love with (yet another) stripper and woos her with trips to Wisconsin.

14 Lucinda Williams "Real Love"
Lost Highway
Produce-metaphor alert: On this rockin' rave-up, the alt-country queen is on the prowl for a man who'll "squeeze [her] peaches." Careful, they bruise!

15 Delta Spirit "People C'Mon"
Rounder
Scuzzy, hand-clappy Cali indie rock encouraging all personages in the vicinity to please join in this activity!

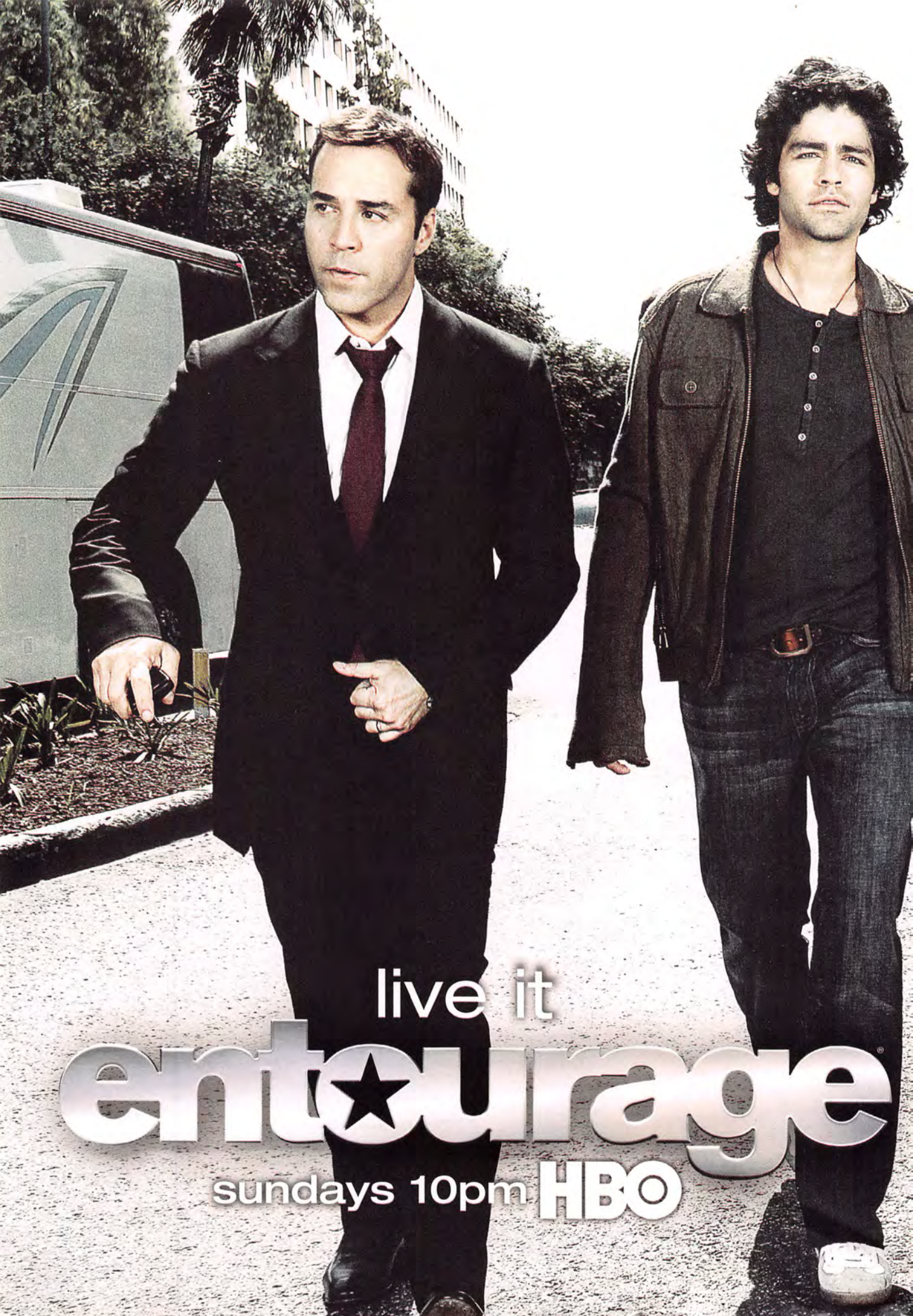
16 The Cool Kids "Full & Paid"
C.A.K.E./Chocolate Industries
Armed with rhymes about unparalleled flyness, this hip-hop duo continues to party like it's 1987.

17 Okkervil River "Calling and Not Calling My Ex"
Jagjaguwar
A girl, a phone and a heart full of regrets: Austin's best short-story writer happens to front one of its finest rock bands too.

18 Lindsey Buckingham "Great Day"
Reprise
From the Fleetwood Mac alum, acoustic-guitar fire with an inspiring message: Old dudes can rock!

19 Kings of Leon "Sex on Fire"
RCA
A slow burner about bangin' the Human Torch. Warning: Do not try this at home!

20 Automatic Loveletter "Parker"
Epic
Part Courtney Love, part Hayley Williams, Juliet Simms pines for some jerk named Parker on this monster emo anthem.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MONTRÉAL

It's the indie-rock capital of North America—study up with our tip sheet on eating, drinking and ogling your way through La Belle Province

1 BEST PLACE TO DISCOVER THE NEXT ARCADE FIRE
LA SALA ROSSA
4848 St. Laurent Blvd.
This concert hall and tapas joint is ground zero for Montréal's indie scene. Had you been there in 2002, "you might've caught Arcade Fire as openers," says Stills frontman Tim Fletcher.

2 BEST PLACE TO HOBNOB WITH LEMURS
MONTRÉAL BIODÔME
4777 Pierre-De-Coubertin Ave.
Tired of chatting up drunk 18-year-olds with French accents? Seek respite among the penguins, capybaras and re-created ecosystems here.

3 BEST DELICIOUS ARGUMENT FOR CARDIAC ARREST
RESTO LA BANQUISE
994 Rachel St. East
La Banquise offers 25 different variations on the heart-stopping *poutine*—a meal-size plate of fries slathered in gravy and melted cheese curds. "There's one called the Elvis" (topped with minced meat, peppers and mushrooms), Kanye West's DJ, A-Trak, tells us. Bonus: Beer is served till 3 in the morning.

4 BEST OFF-THE-RADAR AFRICAN DANCE CLUB
CLUB BALATTOU
4372 St. Laurent Blvd.
This has been an oasis for African, jazz, Latino and calypso performances since the '80s. "My parents used to go clubbing there," raves Dave 1 of synth-hoppers Chromeo. "It's real vintage!"

5 BEST TOPLESS BREAKFAST
LES PRINCESSES SUPER SEXY
4970 Hochelaga St.
This greasy spoon is tucked into Montréal's blue-collar east end—"the area with the highest quantity of non-ironic mullets," notes Dave 1. The servers work the room with their boobs out. That's what we call putting the *tit* in *bon appétit*!

KEN TAYLOR

WEAR THIS

Triple F.A.T. Goose
Back in, say, 1994, it often felt like you couldn't watch a rap video without seeing someone wearing Triple F.A.T. Goose, an urban-skewing clothing line. Now, it's being relaunched. Our favorites are the T-shirts and caps, featuring bright, minimalist graphics and steeped in early-'90s nostalgia. If the Cool Kids and Santogold aren't rocking these by the time you read this, we'll be surprised. Check triplefatgoose.com for more info.

WATCH THIS

MOVIE
Sex Drive
It's *The Sure Thing* for the Facebook generation: Nice guy hits the open road to lose his virginity to a girl he met on the Internet. Featuring Seth Green as a wise-ass Amish auto mechanic, Clark Duke as an unlikely lothario and Fall Out Boy as Fall Out Boy. Opens October 10.

Live on Blender.com —now!

Pussycat Dolls
Too hot for print: Check out exclusive outtakes from our sweaty-hot cover shoot with Nicole Scherzinger (left) and the girls. *Rowr!*

***Blender* Videocast**
The weekly *Blender* Burner videocast brings you breaking news, must-have downloads and footage from our photo shoots and interviews. *Blender*, fresh from the digital oven!

CLICK ON THIS

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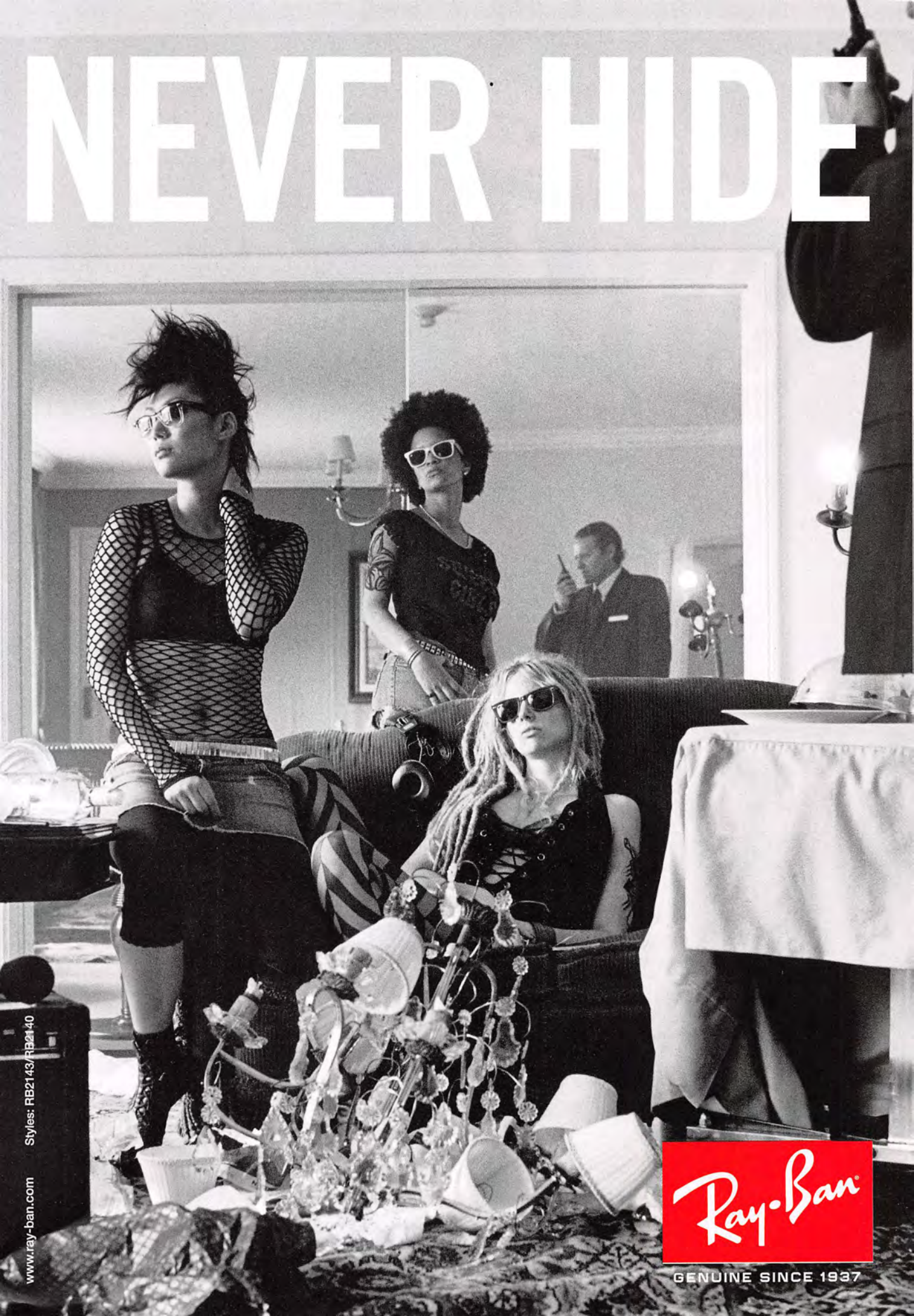
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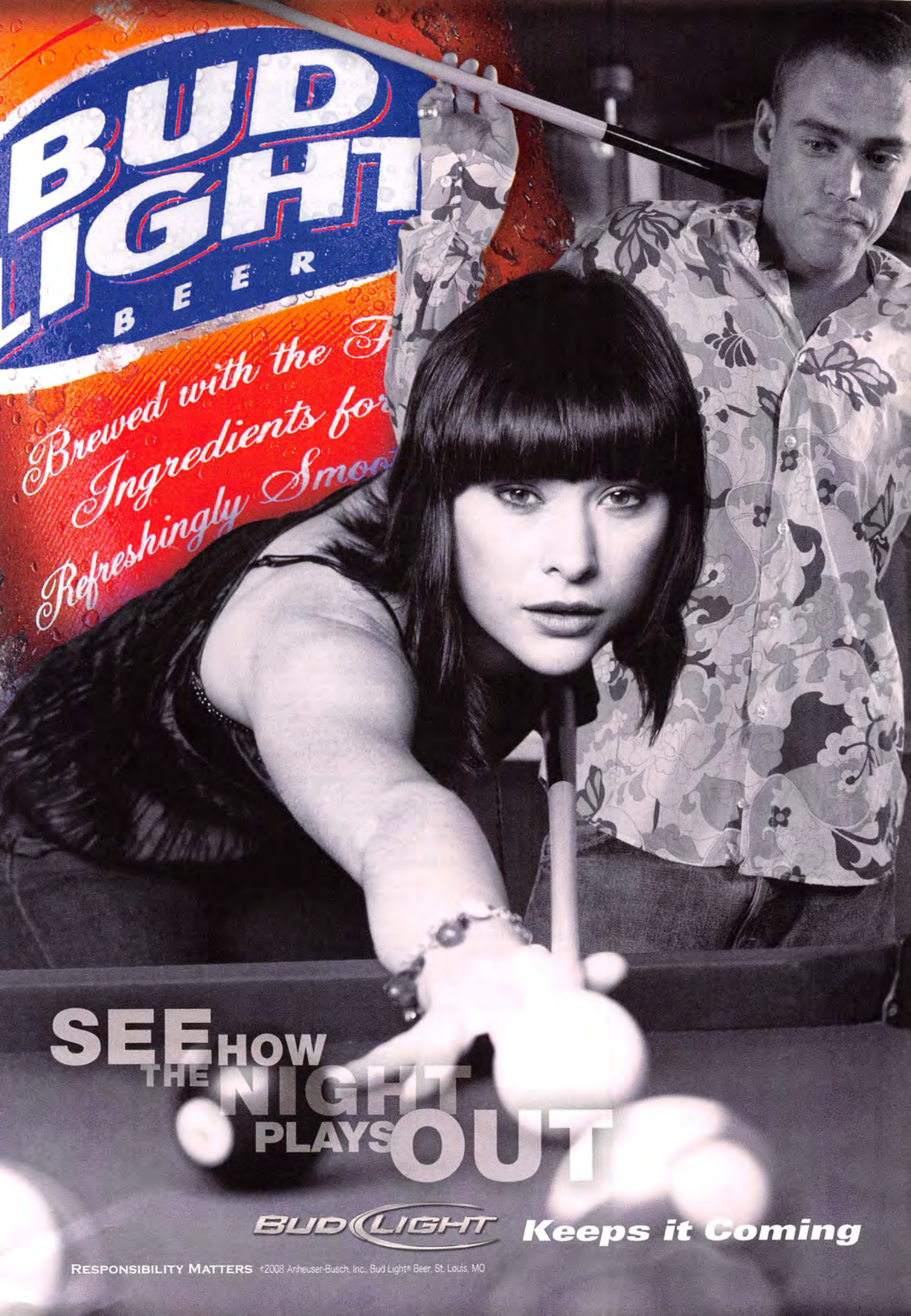
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October 2008 issue, Volume 7, Number 9. Blender is published 11 times per year by Dennis Publishing, Inc., 1040 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10018. Tel (212) 302-2626; Fax (212) 302-2635; **blender.com**

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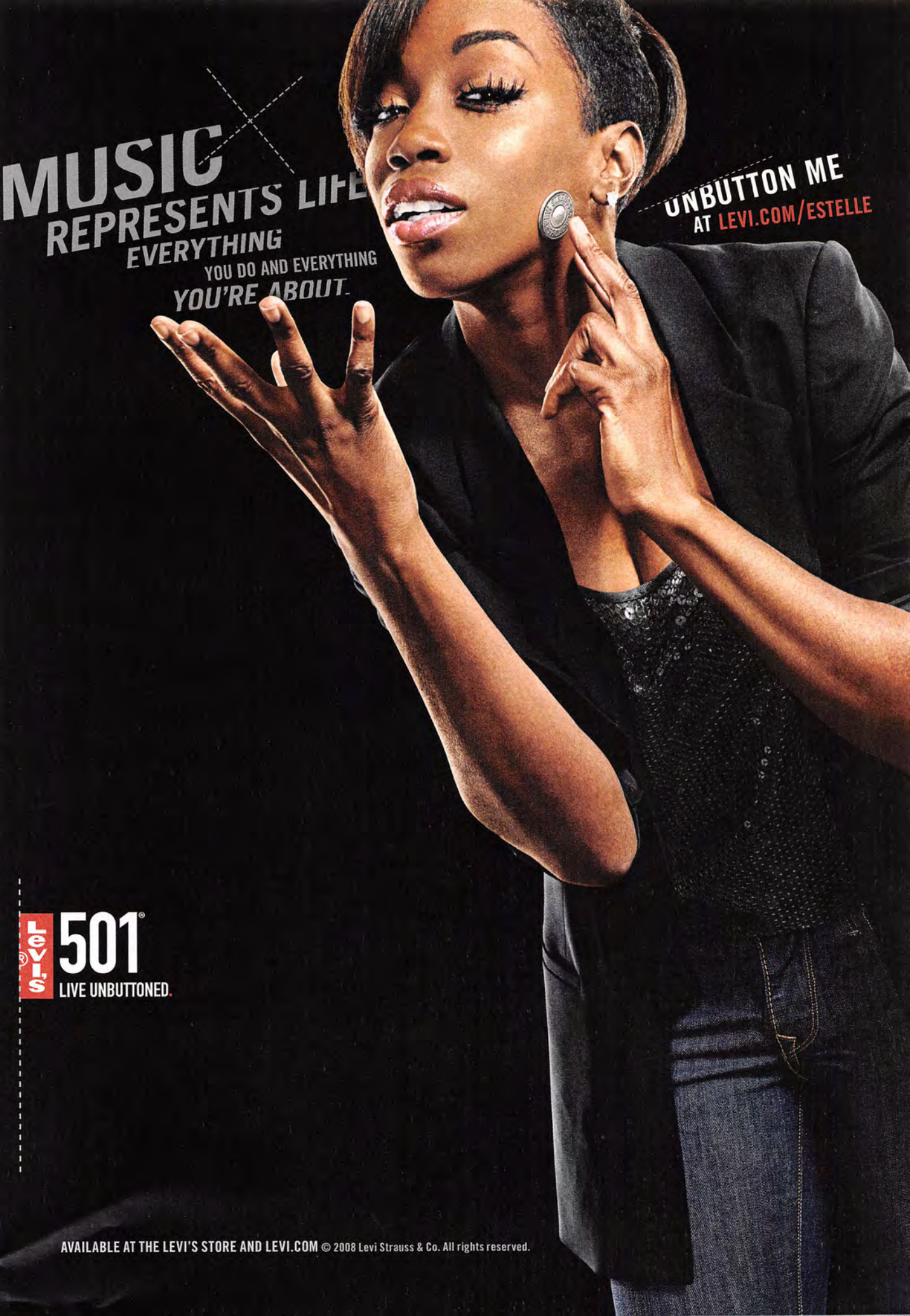
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We've Got

mail

Because sharing is caring

Our August cover story on **Jack Black** ("G.I. Jack"), in which the Hollywood funnyman talked candidly about his past experimentation with everything from acid to heroin, sparked a spirited debate on The Huffington Post blog about the merits of the war on drugs. "Another example of why the drug war is stupid," opined a user called avraamjack. "Most people do just fine. It would have been a great loss to lock him up for drugs." Commenter MTiffany snapped back, "Really? Of which great humanitarian feat or literary masterpiece would the world have been deprived if he had been locked up?" Clearly, MTiffany has never watched *Tenacious D in the Pick of Destiny* while baked out of his or her skull.

ALWAYS BET ON BLACK
Thank you, *Blender*, for your story on Jack Black! He's a funny motherfucker who seems like he'd be genuinely cool to hang out with. There is no fake Hollywood-image B.S. with him. After I picked up the issue with Jack on the cover, I could not put it down. Now I'm a subscriber!
JANEL SPIEGEL, LAURELDALE, PA

WE GET AROUND
Dear *Blender*, I saw you sitting on a newsstand in plastic wrap, and I noticed you are giving away free downloads to whoever gives you money. Here I am, patiently waiting at home for your arrival, salivating at the thought of what you have to offer me, and there you are giving out the goods all over town. I don't want to break up with you, because you make me happy every month, but I just wanted you to know that you hurt my feelings. I love you, *Blender*.
JASON SCHWAB, COLUMBIA, SC

Jason, which part of "Let's see other people" did you not understand?

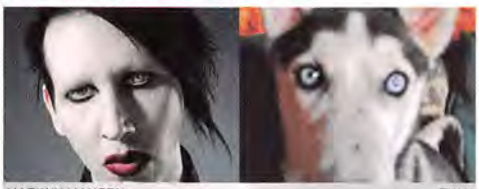
COLD DISCOMFORT
One word comes to mind after reading August's Dear Superstar with Chris Martin: *dipshit*. His smugness and attempts to be "one of the guys" just got to me. I didn't find him the least bit sincere, humorous or interesting—the same way I feel about Coldplay's music.
MIKE GROSS, BISMARCK, ND

HILTON HATER
Blender, I'm appalled you would even consider interviewing Perez Hilton ("Who Does Perez Hilton Think He Is?" July). He's a liar, a phony and a gross, ugly pig who will do anything to gain notoriety. What a poor choice. You have lost a faithful reader.
VICKY ZORNES, RENO, NV

ALL THAT YAZ
I was delighted by your recent article about electronic-music guru Vince Clarke ("Station to Station," July). I read it with glee, planning to cut out the sweet illustration of Vince for posterity. And I'm almost 30, so it's been a while since I cut a picture of somebody out of a magazine! Imagine my distress when I realized that I threw the issue away. Thankfully, you ran the picture on Blender.com, so I printed it from there.
S. ZIMBLE, PITTSBURGH

Man, you're going to have the sweetest-looking locker in your adult-ed class!

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS ...


MARILYN MANSON
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THE DOG

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STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN OR HIGHWAY TO HELL?

BANGING GROUPIES OR STUDYING SCRIPTURE, HOOVERING DRUGS OR PRAISING THE LORD—POP'S HITMAKERS HAVE LONG STRUGGLED WITH THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE. SO WHO'S ON TOP IN THE BATTLE FOR MUSIC'S SOUL, GOD OR SATAN? LET'S SETTLE THIS ONCE AND FOR ALL! BY MARC SPITZ

In 1985, rapper, future Geto Boy and little person Bushwick Bill was a lowly Bible student trekking through Texas on his way to India to do missionary work. There, perhaps at a dusty crossroads, the Devil snagged him. "Somehow, don't ask me how, I became hype man for the Geto Boys," he says. "I diverted from God's path, and it took me on a whirlwind of confusion"—and cost him his right eye in 1991, when his girlfriend shot him after a night of drinking and fighting. "If there's sunshine, then there's rain. If there's God, there's the Devil. There was a spiritual warfare between them within me," Bill says. Today, the three-foot-six man who once rapped, "Time to pay up motherfuckers, these are the wages of sin!" is back on the righteous path. In July, he announced the retirement of his bloodthirsty alter ego, Chuckie. His new solo album, *Testimony of Redemption*, features tracks like "Pull the Trigger on the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **NATHAN FOX**

"IT GOES ON AND ON AND ON, HEAVEN AND HELL."

Demon" and "Renewed Mind" (which references the Geto Boys' biggest hit, "Mind Playing Tricks on Me"): "It's a new year with my past behind/No more playing tricks on my renewed mind." While surely a milestone in penance rap, Bill's familiar arc stretches across generations of popular music, starting with blues master Robert Johnson's deal with the Devil at the Crossroads, circa 1936. God and Satan have sparred for the hearts of our ax- and mic-wielding heroes for a century now. So who's winning? We asked Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League, and Joel Gausten, a warlock from the Church of Satan, to weigh in on rock's religious crossovers.

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THE CROSSROADS

To hell and back with the superstars of rock & roll

SCRIPTURE COMMENTATORS

WG: Warlock Gausten, *Church of Satan*

BD: Bill Donohue, *Catholic League President*

HEAVEN

1958

Fearing that a flamboyant lifestyle and raunchy lyrics (originally: "Tutti Frutti loose booty") would damn him, **LITTLE RICHARD** enrolls in Bible college and goes gospel. By '64, he was again singing about Miss Molly's affinity for balling. • **WG:** We'll let God have the win here.

1967

Tormented by booze and speed, **JOHNNY CASH** crawls into Tennessee's Nickajack Cave and lays down to die but wakes hours later, follows a shaft of light and emerges born again. He marries June Carter and walks the line. • **WG:** Heaven may have greeted him, but I would've loved to have met him for a drink along the way.

1983

The first Christian metal band, **STRYPER** righteously rock black-and-yellow spandex so tight it leaves little doubt as to their religious affiliation. In 1990, they release the secular *Against the Law*, then return to the fold with 2005's *Reborn*. • **WG:** Sheep in wolves' clothing are still sheep. **BD:** Heavy metal *can* be a delivery system.

2005

After bottoming out and getting divorced, Korn bassist **BRIAN "HEAD" WELCH** kicked meth, quit his dark-sided band, got baptized in the river Jordan, grew a Jesus beard and put out the solo *Save Me From Myself*. • **WG:** He, not God, is responsible for his transformation.

2003–05

Former minister's daughter **JESSICA SIMPSON** divorces Nick Lachey and hooks up a pink-bikini friction dance with the General Lee in a video. • **BD:** She's basking in it. That's not evil at work. That's really an asshole.

2008

In '01, 16-year-old Katy Hudson released a Christian album featuring "Faith Won't Fail" and "Trust in Me." It was not a hit. Seven years later, rechristened **KATY PERRY**, she hits No. 1 with "I Kissed a Girl." • **BD:** Those who start with sincerity and become corrupted ... are gonna pay with their souls.

2003

Evanescence's label asks God-rock outlets to take their records off the shelves, contradicting guitarist Ben Moody's claim that the band's message was "God is love." Siren **AMY LEE** says, "I never wanted to be associated with it. It was a Ben thing." • **BD:** You're not a hypocrite if you stand for nothing.

1999

After her third Christmas album, wholesome **AMY GRANT** alienates her base by divorcing fellow Christian-pop singer Gary Chapman and marrying secular, also recently divorced, country crooner Vince Gill. • **BD:** Nothing wrong with getting a divorce!

1979

BOB DYLAN tours in support of his born-again albums, *Slow Train Coming* and *Saved*, preaching from the stage. By the late '90s, he had distanced himself from any organized religion. • **WG:** With age comes enlightenment, I suppose.

1975

Convinced demons covet his bodily fluids, a drug-crazed **DAVID BOWIE** draws strange symbols on the curtains of his rented L.A. mansion and has a white witch exorcise his pool. Also exorcised: Bowie's security deposit. • **WG:** More indicative of cocaine use than a home run for God or Satan.

HELL

BD: The house always wins?

WG: Rock music is the soundtrack of rebellion, carnality and untainted human passion. For that reason, the Devil will always win.

GOD 4 TALLY 6 SATAN

GAUSTEN: SHANNON GARDNER; DONOHUE: DAVID BEYDA; CASH: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; WELCH: STEVE GRANITZ/WIREIMAGE; PERRY: STEFANIE KEENAN/WIREIMAGE; GRANT: DANIEL J. BARRY/WIREIMAGE; BOWIE: CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE; DYLAN: RON GALELLA/WIREIMAGE; LEE: ANNAMARIA DISANTO/WIREIMAGE; SIMPSON: JASON MESSER/RETNA; STRYPER: ROSS MARINO/RETNA; LITTLE RICHARD: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES.

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"THERE'S A KILLER ON THE LOOSE AGAIN."

The Killers' new sound: Business casual.

ALL ABOUT OUR ALBUM

Producer Stuart Price
Studio The Killers' private studio, Las Vegas
Last album *Sam's Town*, 2006
New album Untitled, due late 2008

IN THE STUDIO

"OUR MOST POP-Y"

THE KILLERS GET A SYNTH-DISCO MAKEOVER BY MADONNA'S PRODUCER

The Killers learned a thing or two about predictions after 2006, when singer Brandon Flowers said their second album, *Sam's Town*, would go down as one of the best of the past 20 years. This time, "there are no proclamations to make," bassist Mark Stoermer says. "We'll just put it out and see what happens."

Ideas for the new full-length started in the isolation and recovery that followed two straight years of nonstop touring and recording. "We were away from each other for four months, sending demos back and forth over the computer with GarageBand," Stoermer says. "Nobody was stressed out." Reunited in their own spankin'-new Las Vegas studio, he adds, "everyone's in a better mood."

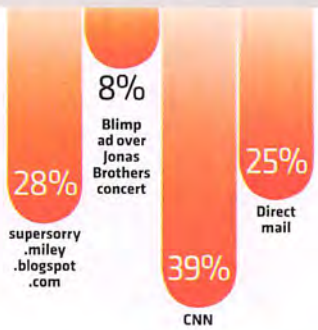
Contributing to the good vibes was producer Stuart Price, the Brit electro-disco king who remixed the Killers' "Mr. Brightside" and reconnected Madonna with her groove for *Confessions on a Dance Floor*. "He clicks with us really well," Stoermer says. Price gave the disco-tinged track tentatively called "Vibration" a "late-'70s New York, Stones feel," Stoermer says, and added futuristic noise to the straight-up rocker "Spaceman"— but stopped well short of a wall-of-sound approach. "There's nothing extra," Stoermer adds. "I think it's our most pop-y album but at the same time our most experimental." DAN REILLY

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

• **TIMBALAND** is working on *Shock Value 2* with guests **Madonna** and **T-Pain** and says if **Jay-Z** wants, he'll make Hova's next record "a monster."
• **Velvet Revolver** are penning songs for their first record without **Scott Weiland**, the follow-up to 2007's *Libertad*.
• Buzzed-about rapper **Wale** is working with **Mark Ronson (Amy Winehouse)** on his major-label debut, with collaborators the **Neptunes** and **Travis Barker**, among others, due January.

BLENDER'S BURNING QUESTION

WHERE WILL THE NEXT MILEY CYRUS SCANDAL BREAK?



Reader Wisdom

"In her next marketing meeting."
Rick LaGrange, Erie, PA

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WORD!

"WHEN I WATCH BILLY JOEL, BOB DYLAN AND BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, I SEE MYSELF HEADED DOWN THEIR PATH."

—NAS

TIMBALAND: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/WIREIMAGE; CYRUS: BAUER GRIFFIN; WORD! ILLUSTRATION: ANDY FRIEDMAN.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **DARREN ANKENMAN**

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"OF COURSE MAMA'S GONNA HELP BUILD THE WALL."

Getting called the next Beyoncé by Timbaland is no shabby way to land your first album. "Those are big shoes to fill," says 25-year-old Keri Hilson. But she's not looking to slip into someone else's stilettos, nor is she keen on following in the footsteps of pop's most supreme divas. "The difference between myself and the Mariahs or even the Nicole Scherzingers," Hilson modestly explains, "is the fact that I am an established songwriter. I am capable of writing a hit, and it's proven." She helped pen Timbaland's Top 10 single "The Way I Are," Britney Spears's "Gimme More" and Ludacris's "Runaway Love."

Her first stab at fame came with two failed Destiny's Child–like girl groups while still a teenager. As a theater major at Emory University, she was a classic type-A overachiever, toiling away in a dingy studio, writing, arranging, producing and engineering while the other members of her study group were tucked into their clean sheets. It paid off. Hilson hooked up with an Atlanta clique of cool kids who formed a songwriting collective called the Clutch. She dropped out of college when the hits started coming. Along the way, she even proved she could play a convincing vixen—that's Hilson tormenting Usher in his "Love in This Club" video.

In reality, though, she's more like a shark than bait. Usher, Jermaine Dupri and others have offered songwriting contracts, but Hilson never bit. "I knew too much," she says. "I was young, and some people thought I was naive, but I did my homework." Playing hard-to-get paid off. "I think women in this business quit too easy. They get hurt by things. They allow themselves to go on these emotional roller coasters, and I'm not about that." Besides, she wanted to be a star, not a star maker: "Songwriting for me was my plan B. It was always my dream to be a solo artist! I don't know that any child is like, 'Oh I can't wait to grow up and share my dream with others,' you know?"

KERI HILSON

THE WHIP-SMART SINGER-SONGWRITER BEHIND RADIO'S BIGGEST BANGERS STEPS INTO THE SPOTLIGHT AND SHINES BY ELIZABETH GOODMAN • PHOTOGRAPH BY BLOSSOM BERKOFSKY

All the boys in PE were totally psyched when Coach Hilson was hired.

ALL ABOUT ME!

Weirdest pet peeve
"I can't stand it when my feet are dirty."

Most awesome gift from a fan
"It was from a guy named Alex. He painted a portrait of me and sent it from London."

Sleeping philosophy: PJs or in the buff?
"I wear a combination of both. It all depends on my mood."

OUT NOW
In a Perfect World ...
(INTERSCOPE)

STYLING: TAMMY ECKENSWILLER; HAIR: OHARDY.COM/ILLUSIONS MNGT; MAKEUP: JACKIE SANCHEZ/SMASHBOX/B LYNN GROUP. CLOTHING, TANK TOP: CLU; BRA: HILSON'S OWN; SHORTS: AMERICAN APPAREL; EARRINGS: ALEXIS BITTAR.

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"I COME FROM A LAND DOWN UNDER."

INXS "NEED YOU TONIGHT"

HOW SIX FUNK-LOVING AUSSIES GOT THE WHOLE WORLD TO SLIDE OVER AND GIVE THEM A MOMENT **BY ROB SHEFFIELD**

How can you tell when your band is bombing onstage? INXS got a subtle hint during their first American tour in 1983. "In Texas, somebody threw a pistol onstage," guitarist Andrew Farriss recalls. "There was a note tied to the barrel: YOU'RE GONNA NEED THIS."

Strange as it seems now, the '80s were a time when it was still risky business to mix up funk with rock & roll. By 1987, INXS were already sitting on an enviable pile of rock-radio hits, but the Australian six-piece wanted to dance. "We said, 'Let's try something a little more out there and play the funk stuff,'" Farriss tells *Blender*. "We wanted to be sonic explorers, like *Star Trek*."

The result was "Need You Tonight," the lead single from the band's sixth album, *Kick*. With mysterioso synth beats and hair-flipping stud Michael Hutchence moaning "Your moves are *so raw*" like some kind of sex-club sushi chef, "Need You Tonight" put them into dance-floor rotation—even in Texas.

INXS had been kicking around for almost 10 years, the same six mates who'd started out playing pubs in Sydney. "We loved rock & roll, but we hated the stupidity of it," Hutchence recalled back in 1988. So they covered Chic and War jams alongside new wavers like Ian Dury and the Blockheads. "We'd get weird looks in the pubs, because this was a hardcore working-class AC/DC environment," Farriss says.

A turning point for INXS was working with one of their original heroes, Nile Rodgers of Chic. "He randomly came backstage one night," Farriss says. "He'd heard us on MTV and wanted to say hi." Rodgers produced the 1984 single "Original Sin," which flopped on U.S. radio but inspired the band to chase friskier beats.

Hutchence and Farriss planned a trip to Hong Kong to brainstorm *Kick* material. "I called a taxi to take me to the airport," Farriss recalls. "While I waited, I started fiddling with an eight-track recorder and this riff. When the taxi turned up, I said, 'Can you wait a minute?'" The first thing Farriss did in Hong Kong was play Hutchence the tape he made while waiting for the cab. The guitar lick had the stuttering syncopation of vintage Chic. "Michael said, 'This is sick!' He wrote the lyrics off the cuff," Farriss recalls. In two hours, the song was complete.

Girls around the world heard "Need You Tonight" and decided the feeling was mutual. But under the seductive surface, it's easy to hear the emotional turmoil in Hutchence's voice, especially when he shouts, "I'm lonely!" Ever since Hutchence's shocking 1997 passing—ruled a suicide, he died naked and alone—the song has seemed melancholy. "Michael could express something poignant in just a few words," Farriss says. "'I'm lonely'—well, that's the human condition, ultimately, isn't it?"

INXS have carried on without Hutchence, hiring a new lead singer via a 2005 reality show, *Rock Star: INXS*. Winner J.D. Fortune is now the official frontman, but "Need You Tonight" is still the band's signature song. As Farriss admits, "It's a weird pop song. It has no proper verse or chorus. At one point it suddenly has five bars." But that just reflects Hutchence's unzipped personality. "Michael didn't have a very conservative approach to songwriting," Farriss says. "But he didn't have a conservative approach to anything, really." B

VITAL STATISTICS

Album *Kick*
Label Atlantic
Performers Michael Hutchence (vocals); Andrew Farriss (guitar, keyboards); Kirk Pengilly (saxophone); Garry Beers (bass); Tim Farriss (guitar); Jon Farriss (drums)
Writers Hutchence, Andrew Farriss
Producer Chris Thomas
Chart debut October 24, 1987
Highest chart position 1

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AD ROCK

30 SECONDS TO SELLOUT

WHAT'S THE POP-STAR PAYDAY WHEN MUSICIANS TURN TV-JINGLE WRITERS? INDUSTRY INSIDERS PUT A PRICE TAG ON GENIUS BY JEFF ROSENTHAL

Madonna + Sunsilk
Ad: "4 Minutes" plays over old videos you actually know.
Payday: $1.5M–$2M
Insider estimate: "Just her name and likeness command more than a million."
Makes us want to buy: Enough carbs to restore Madonna to her former glory

They Might Be Giants + Dunkin' Donuts
Ad: Custom-composed "All Night Blowout" plays as ladies clean up after last night's party.
Payday: $50K–$75K
Insider estimate: "You get paid much less for jingles."
Makes us want to buy: A keg-uccino

Santogold + Ford
Ad: "L.E.S. Artistes" plays over *Tron*-and-*Matrix*-esque scenes.
Payday: $100K–$200K
Insider estimate: "That's pretty standard for what car companies pay for an emerging act."
Makes us want to buy: The *Tron* DVD

Meat Loaf + AT&T
Ad: Loaf plays a dad who sings "Paradise by the GoPhone Light," a twist on his classic.
Payday: $500K–$600K
Insider estimate: "You pay more for reworking a song. Plus, there's acting!"
Makes us want to buy: Hamburger Helper

The Ting Tings + Apple
Ad: "Shut Up and Let Me Go" plays behind psychedelic dancing silhouettes.
Payday: $0
Insider estimate: "The exposure is payment enough for small acts."
Makes us want to buy: 'Shrooms

Ludacris + AT&T
Ad: Luda raps as himself *and* as a phone.
Payday: Several million
Insider estimate: "I think it's still good for AT&T, despite Ludacris getting pulled from Pepsi."
Makes us want to buy: Who are we kidding? An iPhone!

SECRET SHOW-OFF!

COLDPLAY ROCKS THIS CHICK'S BACKYARD

A Valley girl wins the chance to have Chris Martin cooing at her house!

COLDPLAY: MATTHEW WALERSTEIN.

- **VENUE** THE SUBURBAN YARD OF A WEST HILLS, CALIFORNIA, GIRL NAMED JESSICA, WHO WON A RADIO-STATION CONTEST
- **CROWD** ABOUT 60, INCLUDING JESSICA'S EXTENDED FAMILY AND SPYING NEIGHBORS PERCHED ON ROOFTOPS
- **SET LIST** "SPEED OF SOUND," "DON'T PANIC," "GREEN EYES," "VIOLET HILL," "LOVERS IN JAPAN," "YELLOW"
- **OVERHEARD** CHRIS MARTIN RESPONDED TO JESSICA'S REQUEST TO PLAY "YELLOW" WITH TREPIDATION: "IF WE CAN'T GET IT RIGHT IN THE STUDIO WITH $8 MILLION WORTH OF EQUIPMENT, IT'S PROBABLY NOT GONNA WORK HERE."

MATTHEW WALERSTEIN

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"I WANT A RANGE LIFE/IF I COULD SETTLE DOWN."

HOW TO LIVE OFF THE GRID

BRIGHTBLACK MORNING LIGHT'S FOLK FREAK NATHAN SHINEYWATER ON DITCHING WALL OUTLETS, NEIGHBORS AND SUPERMARKETS—BEFORE THE APOCALYPSE!

BY ELIZABETH GOODMAN
PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL SCHMELLING

OUT NOW
Motion to Rejoin
(MATADOR)

Shineywater and bandmate Rachael Hughes in their master bathroom.

1. HARNESS THE SUN

"We live in New Mexico with four solar panels—so you have to know the wattage of each electrical item you use. I've ritualized my energy consumption around the sun, waking up at dawn every day. At 8,500-feet elevation, I can literally feel the sunrise pulling my blood around when I'm asleep."

2. WORK THE EARTH

"I feel really enchanted by the first garden that I planted all by seed. I'm pulling good-sized vegetables out of it every day and feeding my friends. It feels good to look at the world, be fed up with it and take responsibility for it. It gives you groovy vegetables, man; they've got your spirit in them."

3. WE ARE ALL GONNA DIE. LET'S GO FISHING!

"If you're following the Mayan calendar, 2012 is the end. That's when the asteroid is coming. So maybe just go, *I should fish for my sustenance for a year just to say I did it*. That's where my head is. I don't see anything as being permanent."

4. DRINK, SMOKE, FLOAT, REPEAT

"I wake up, have some coffee, smoke a joint and go for a walk up on the mesas. I come back and work in the garden. If there are no monsoons, we'll throw some tubes in the Rio Grande and float. I get my beer on the Indian reservation nearby because it's really cheap."

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"GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS I DO ADORE."

Did Frank Zappa really have a backing band made up entirely of groupies?

Sammie Avila, San Diego

They weren't his backing band, but Zappa did put together an all-groupie group in late-'60s Los Angeles. Called the GTO's, for Girls Together Outrageously, the sextet—Pamela Des Barres, Linda Sue Parker, Christine Frka, Mercy Fontenot, Sandra Leano and Lucy Offerall—opened for Zappa with a bizarre mix of singing, dancing and spoken-word poetry.

The GTO's recorded a single album, 1969's *Permanent Damage*, which included songs like "Love on an Eleven Year Old Level" and spoken-word interludes about stuffed bras. It was an all-star affair: produced by Zappa, with guest appearances by the Monkees' Davy Jones, Rod Stewart and Jeff Beck. It's also widely agreed to be terrible. But mostly the girls were, like Zappa, provocateurs, playing games with female sexuality—"When I say, 'Sandra, you have the most beautiful breasts in the whole world,' that's not homosexual, it's just what I feel," said one of the girls in a 1969 interview—and presaging the all-girl punk bands of the next decade.

I just started getting into buying records. What's the deal with 180-gram vinyl? What's so good about it?
Ernie Jandel, Henderson, NV

A lot of vinyl albums are pressed on something called 120-gram vinyl, one square meter of which weighs (duh) 120 grams—about the same as an apple. But record geeks and audiophiles often prefer a higher-grade format known as 180-gram vinyl, which weighs—you guessed it—180 grams per square meter. (That's about the same as a hockey puck.) The 180-gram records are thicker and heavier, and less prone to warping (although not, as is wrongly believed, blessed with deeper grooves). They're also often pressed on so-called virgin vinyl, meaning none of it has been recycled, making for fewer impurities in the record (i.e., the clicks and pops you hear during playback).

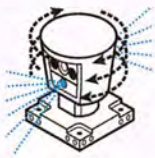
Of course, being thicker and heavier, 180-gram albums are also more expensive. And for the truly snobbish, there is limited-edition 220-gram vinyl, which sounds like angels whispering the secrets of heaven inside your brain.

How did Radiohead make that cool camera-free video for "House of Cards"? *Katie Frasier, Seattle*

step 01

They got a magic microwave. A complex 3-D scanning system, created by Geometric Informatics, projected a grid of light onto Thom Yorke and recorded the reflections. "It's similar to those boxes of pins that make impressions of your hand," says director James Frost.

step 02



They got some lasers. The band also used a laser technology called Light Detection and Ranging—a 3-D scanner that shoots 64 laser beams in 360 degrees at once. "It was the first thing they used after 9/11," Frost says, "so they could see through the smoke."

step 03

They got their *Dark Knight* on. LIDAR is like radar or sonar, only it uses light. "Think of the way a bat uses echolocation to find bugs," Frost explains. A whole lot of bugs, that is: Each revolution of the laser recorded more than a million points of data.

step 04

They made pretty pictures. After gathering all the data, technicians at Zoo Films spent two full months stitching the ones and zeroes together into a cohesive image. Yorke called it "a strange experience." Frost, meanwhile, says, "I can't wait to get back to film."

Don't lase me, bro!

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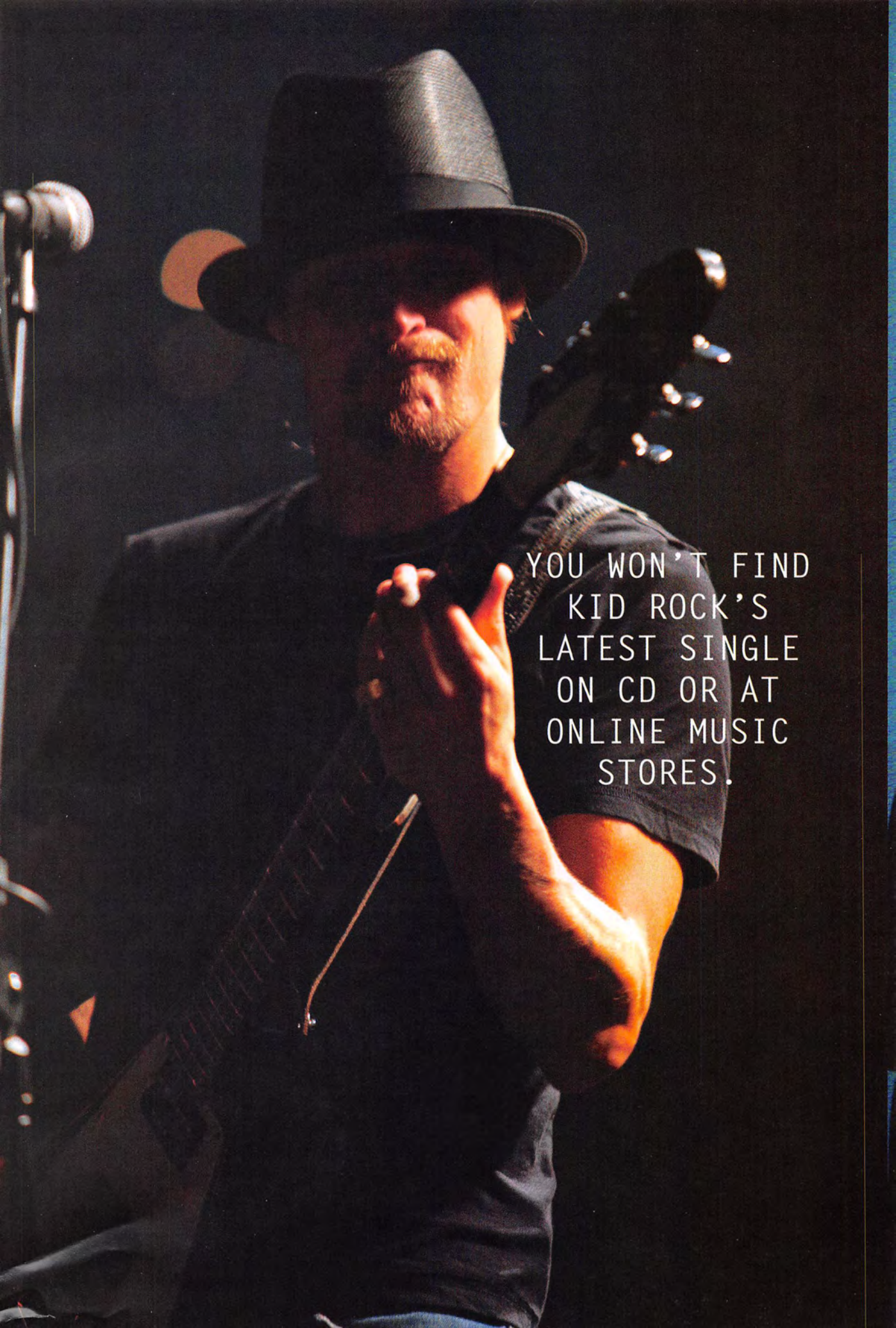
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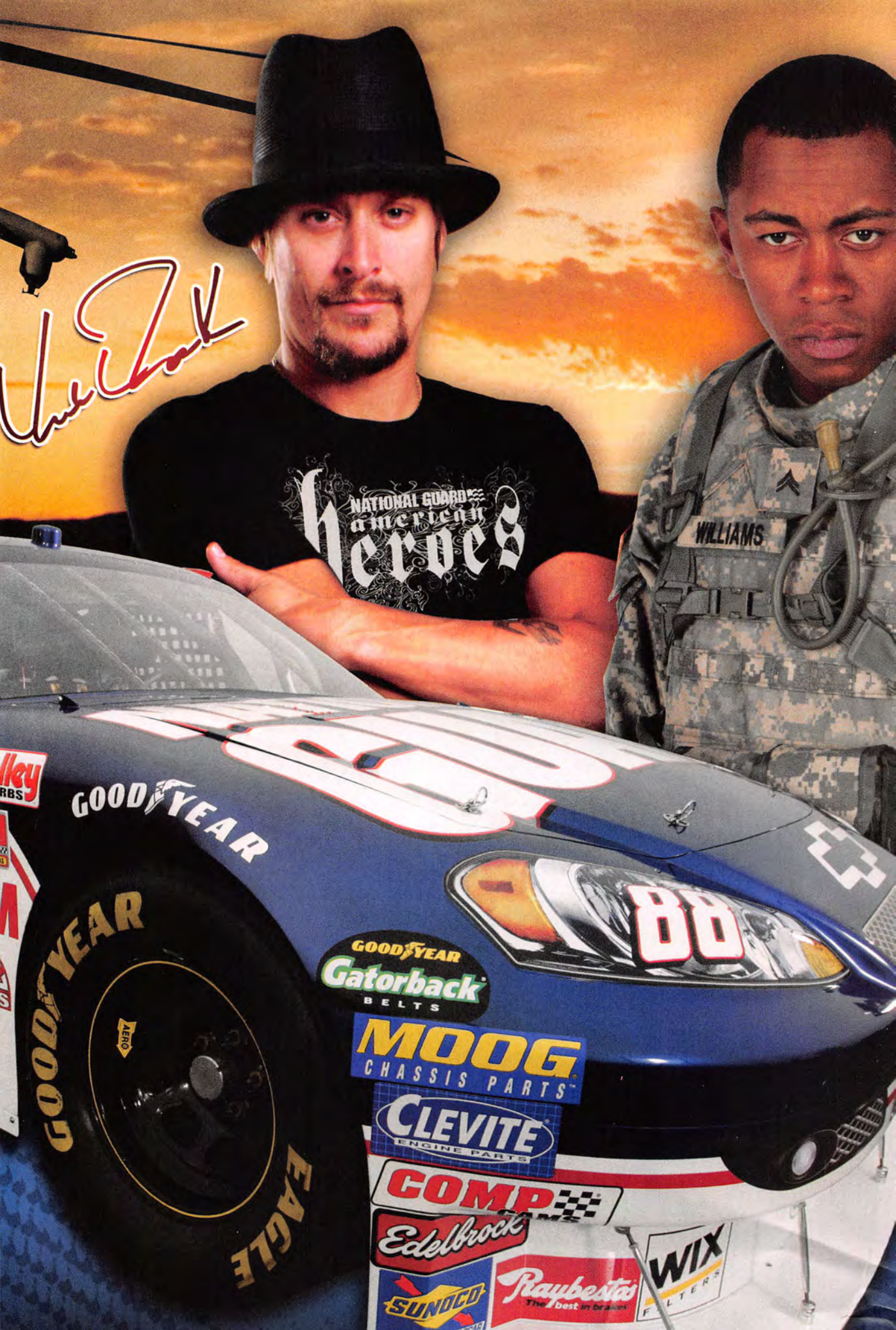
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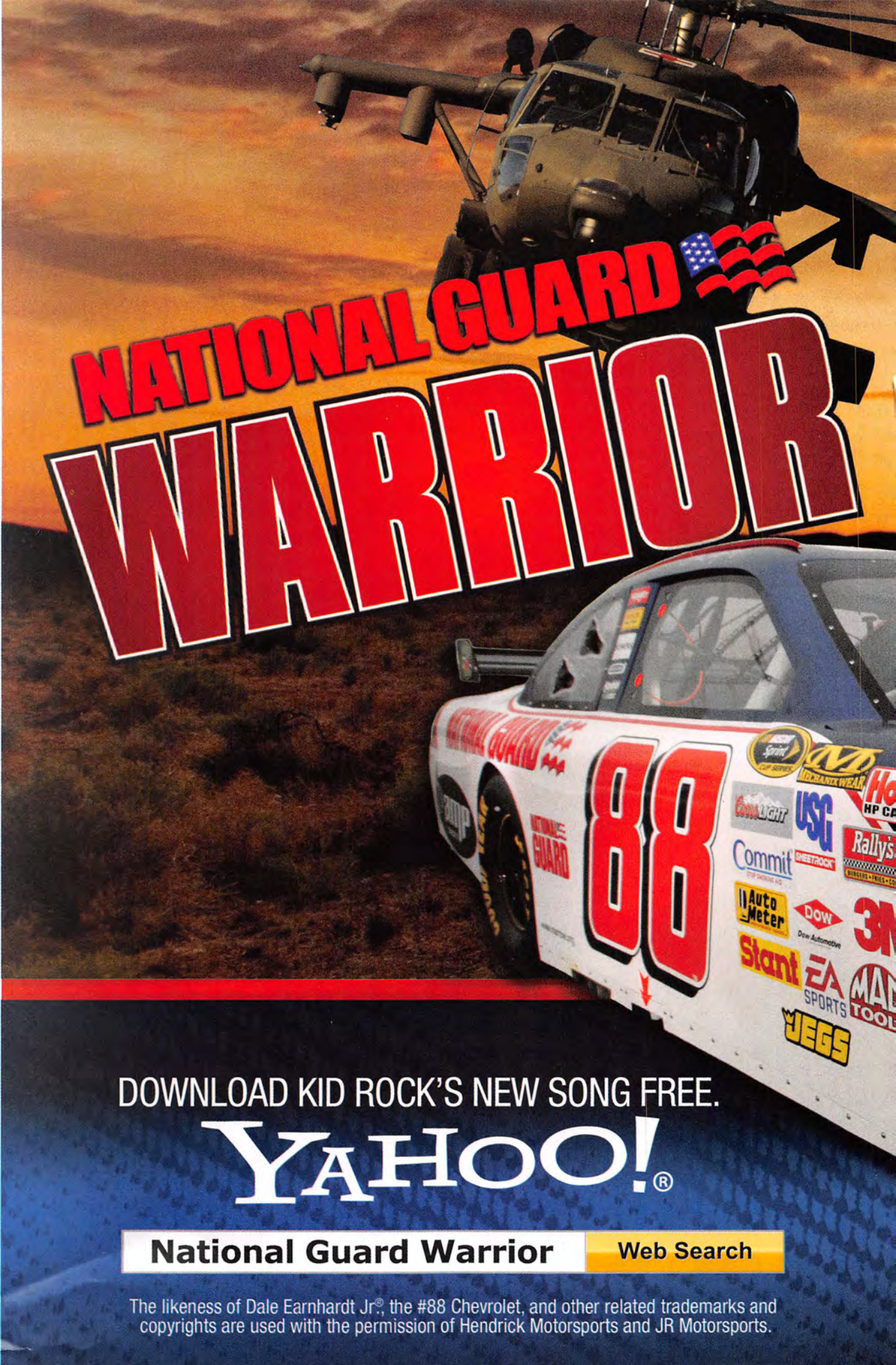
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RANK/TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1 "7 THINGS"	MILEY CYRUS	BREAKOUT *HOLLYWOOD*
2 "I CAN'T BELIEVE IT"	T-PAIN FEAT. LIL WAYNE	THR33 RINGZ *JIVE*
3 "DISTURBIA"	RIHANNA	GOOD GIRL GONE BAD: RELOADED *SRP/DEF JAM*
4 "PEACE SIGN/ INDEX DOWN"	GYM CLASS HEROES FEAT. BUSTA RHYMES	THE QUILT *DECAYDANCE/ FUELED BY RAMEN*
5 "MOVING MOUNTAINS"	USHER	HERE I STAND *LAFACE/ZOMBA*
6 "BETTER IN TIME"	LEONA LEWIS	SPIRIT *J/SYCO MUSIC*
7 "BURNIN' UP"	JONAS BROTHERS	A LITTLE BIT LONGER *HOLLYWOOD*
8 "LOLLIPOP"	LIL WAYNE FEAT. STATIC	THA CARTER III *YOUNG MONEY/ CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL*
9 "ONE STEP AT A TIME"	JORDIN SPARKS	JORDIN SPARKS *JIVE*
10 "SPAZ"	N*E*R*D	SEEING SOUNDS *STAR TRAK/INTERSCOPE*
11 "BAD GIRL"	DANITY KANE FEAT. MISSY ELLIOTT	WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE *BAD BOY/ATLANTIC*
12 "GAMMA RAY"	BECK	MODERN GUILT *DGC*
13 "I KISSED A GIRL"	KATY PERRY	ONE OF THE BOYS *CAPITOL*
14 "PSYCHOSOCIAL"	SLIPKNOT	ALL HOPE IS GONE *ROADRUNNER*
15 "WHEN I GROW UP"	PUSSYCAT DOLLS	DOLL DOMINATION *A&M/INTERSCOPE*
16 "HERO"	NAS FEAT. KERI HILSON	UNTITLED *DEF JAM*
17 "I'LL BE LOVIN' U LONG TIME"	MARIAH CAREY FEAT. T.I.	E=MC² *ISLAND DEF JAM*
18 "LEAVIN"	JESSE McCARTNEY	DEPARTURE *HOLLYWOOD*
19 "DONK"	SOULJA BOY TELL'EM	SOULJABOYTELLEM .COM *COLLIPARK/INTERSCOPE*
20 "HIT THE HEARTBRAKES"	BLACK KIDS	PARTIE TRAUMATIC *COLUMBIA*
21 "COME ON OVER"	JESSICA SIMPSON	DO YOU KNOW *COLUMBIA NASHVILLE*
22 "GET SILLY"	V.I.C.	THE BEAST *REPRISE/WARNER BROS.*
23 "LET'S REGGAE ALL NIGHT"	CSS	DONKEY *SUB POP*
24 "IN MY ROOM"	ALBERT HAMMOND JR.	¿CÓMO TE LLAMA? *RCA/BLACK SEAL*
25 "GET LIKE ME"	DAVID BANNER FEAT. CHRIS BROWN AND YUNG JOC	THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD *UNIVERSAL MOTOWN*
26 "WALKING ON AIR"	KERLI	LOVE IS DEAD *ISLAND DEF JAM*
27 "DANNY CALLAHAN"	CONOR OBERST	CONOR OBERST *MERGE*
28 "EVERY OTHER WEEK"	REBA McENTIRE FEAT. KENNY CHESNEY	REBA: DUETS *MCA NASHVILLE*
29 "CONSTRUCTIVE SUMMER"	THE HOLD STEADY	STAY POSITIVE *VAGRANT*
30 "SPOTLIGHT"	JENNIFER HUDSON	JENNIFER HUDSON *ARISTA*
31 "CHARLOTTE"	BOOKA SHADE	THE SUN & THE NEON LIGHT *GET PHYSICAL*
32 "SEE/SAW"	JAY REATARD	SEE/SAW 7 *MATADOR*
33 "DETROIT"	BLACK GOLD	RUSH

WEEK ENDING AUGUST 31, 2008

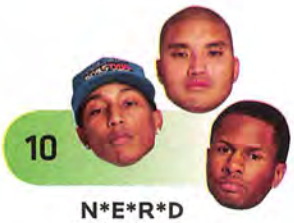
1

MILEY CYRUS
"7 THINGS"
BREAKOUT
The seven things this Disney queen hates about her man? He's vain, he plays games, he's insecure, he's fickle, his friends are jerks and ... hey, math is hard. Get your squeal on at her City of Hope benefit in L.A. on September 14.

HOW WE DID IT
aolmusic.com
The Most Wanted Songs chart is based on the number of audience searches, downloads and video plays on AOLmusic.com.

4

GYM CLASS HEROES FEAT. BUSTA RHYMES
"PEACE SIGN/ INDEX DOWN"
THE QUILT
GCH's Travis McCoy dates Katy Perry—which is either awesome or nerve-racking, depending on his coolness with her kissing girls (*Makes me jealous ... but ... is ... hot!*). Ask him yourself at their London show (9/18).



10

N*E*R*D
"SPAZ"
SEEING SOUNDS
When they aren't superproducing for Gwen Stefani and Jay-Z, Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo are rocking out in this genre-juggling pop outfit. Catch them September 26 at the Austin City Limits music festival.

BECK
"GAMMA RAY"
MODERN GUILT
Sad Beck meets Party Beck on this tambourine-happy jam about burning houses and melting ice caps. Who knew the apocalypse would sound so garage-rocky?! Catch him in Albuquerque (9/23) and Austin (9/27).

12

CYRUS: SHERYL NIELDS; GYM CLASS HEROES: GARY VENTURA; N.E.R.D: LESLIE KEE; BECK: AUTUMN DE WILDE.

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DEAR SUPERSTAR

NOEL GALLAGHER

NOEL GALLAGHER IS IN A GOOD MOOD—which is a relief. The sun is shining (or *sheeee-iiiii-ning*, as his brother Liam would sing), and the notoriously combative songwriter feels confident about Oasis's seventh studio album, *Dig Out Your Soul*. In a vast studio complex on London's western fringe, Noel is overseeing rehearsals for a world tour—the wailing guitar intro to "Morning Glory" is audible from the next room—before heading off to collect his 8-year-old daughter, Anais, from school. "She bought me the new Portishead album," he reports. What did he think? Noel's famous eyebrow slopes downward. "It's very harrowing."

Harrowing is one of the qualities Gallagher hates in rock music. He cherishes the '60s, has little use for any music made after 1972 and scoffs at experimental bands "banging two fucking cabbages together or singing into a tin of beans." *Dig Out Your*

THE **OASIS** LOUDMOUTH ON THE ENVIRONMENT ("NEVER MIND IT"), RADIOHEAD ("NOT AS GOOD AS PEOPLE THINK") AND THAT $200,000 JAGUAR HE ONCE BOUGHT ("IT'S USELESS TO ME") • **BY DORIAN LYNSKEY** • PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIAN BROAD

HEY, FEET OFF THE FURNITURE!

Soul is stuffed with Oasis's baffling lyrics, shameless Beatles references and the lager-hoisting choruses that characterize "Wonderwall," "Champagne Supernova" and "Live Forever." One highlight is "I'm Outta Time," a surprisingly tender ballad from the band's hellraiser-in-chief, Liam. "You don't think that front is him, do you?" asks his older brother, 41. "He's a pussycat."

Oasis's front made them the biggest British band of their generation. Like a cartoon fight in which all you can see is a cloud of dust and whirling fists, their first years passed in a blur of punch-ups, arrests, drug binges, feuds and firings. As he pulls up a chair in readiness for *Blender* readers' questions, Gallagher differentiates Oasis from hipper British bands. "Radiohead and Coldplay think too much," he declares with blunt certainty. "They get to a certain level and start worrying about the environment. That's for the governments of the world to worry about. We need to concentrate on fucking women, taking drugs, wearing sunglasses and being cool. Never mind the polar bears."

"WE LIVE IN THE AGE OF RAP AND R&B. MY ADVICE? DON'T LISTEN TO THE RADIO."

You once worked as a roadie. Did your job include procuring drugs for the band?
FERTILE.GREEN, COLUMBIA, MO
The band, the Inspiral Carpets, didn't take drugs, so there was more for the crew. I look back on those days as some of the best of my life. No photographs, no interviews. Just get up in the morning, make sure the gear works, do the gig and then fucking party.

Your new album is called *Dig Out Your Soul*, which doesn't make much sense. None of your album titles make sense. Do you have trouble naming albums?
NOELIAM87, MERIDEN, CT
Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols—does that make sense? *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—does that make sense? *Dig Out Your Soul* is a metaphor for DJ'ing, when you get out a soul record. The double meaning is, you can also try and find yourself. I wouldn't expect Americans to get it.

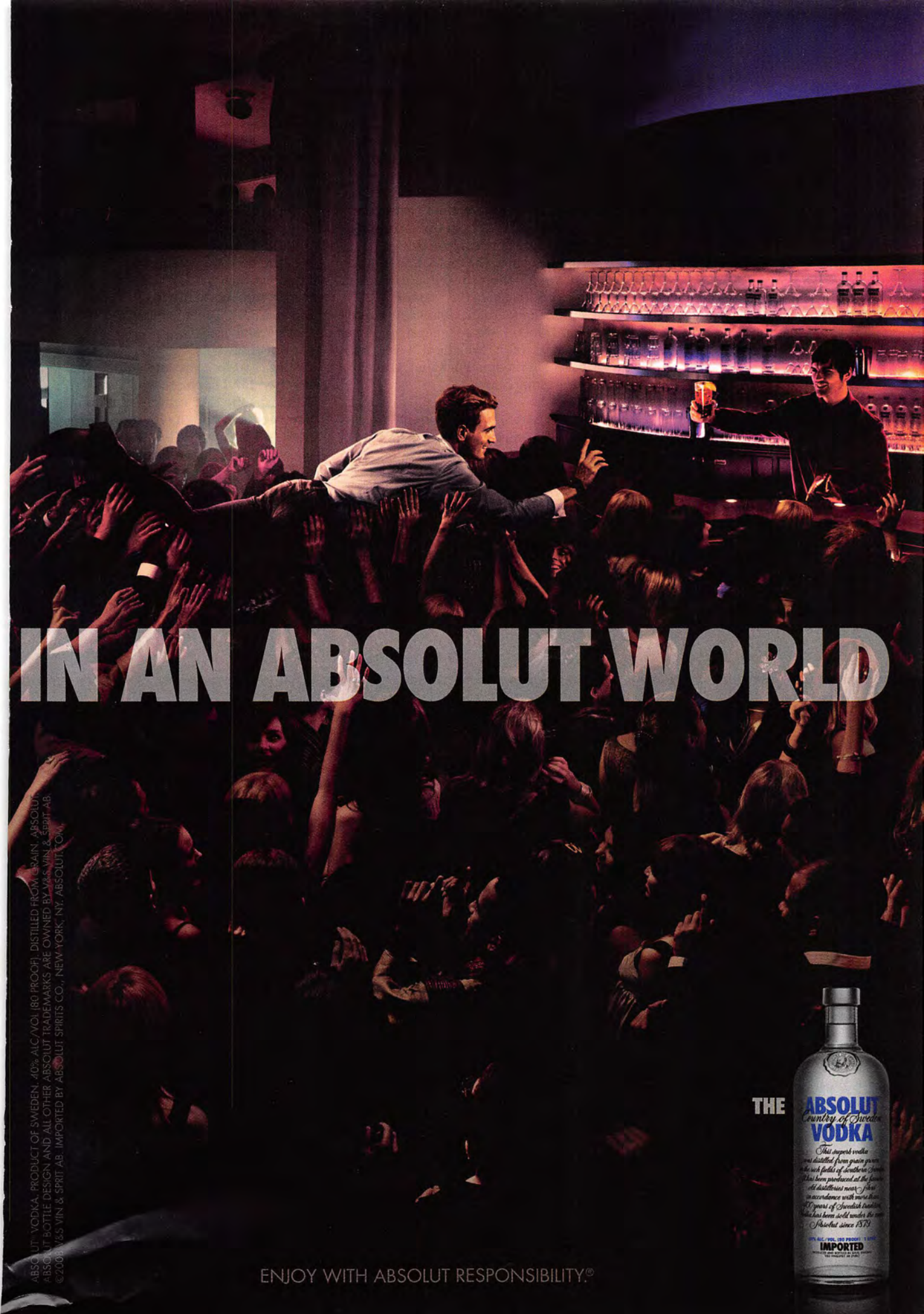
PEPPER SHAKER (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): NOEL'S HOLY GRAIL; JAY-Z COVERS OASIS LIVE; NOBBING IT UP WITH BROTHER LIAM (LEFT); NOEL'S FORMER EMPLOYERS, INSPIRAL CARPETS.

Dude, Jay-Z did an Oasis song at the Glastonbury Festival this summer after you questioned whether he belonged there. Why don't Oasis do a version of Jay-Z's "99 Problems"?
ROSIYOUNG, SEATTLE
That's ridiculous. What did I think of Jay-Z doing "Wonderwall"? It was pretty funny. But I'm not sure one should be seen in public with a white Stratocaster.

I'm an aesthetician and I have to wonder: Has a girlfriend ever tried to get you to tweeze your unibrow?
TANMAN41, OXFORD, MI
I don't speak to my girlfriends. [Laughs.] No. My eyebrows are wild and free, man.

What was the last gift you gave your brother Liam?
SWEETNSALTY, PULLMAN, WA
I bought him a necklace that John Lennon used to wear, but that was years ago. I'm very difficult to buy for, too. When my birthday comes round, I say to my girlfriend, "Let's just go out and get drunk."

JAY-Z: MATT CARDY/GETTY IMAGES; OASIS: PAUL SLATTERY/RETNA; INSPIRAL CARPETS: MUTE RECORDS.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What was the stupidest thing you bought when you became rich?
NOW_IM_64, DENVER
I had built for me a customized 1967 Mark II Jaguar convertible at a cost of £110,000, and I haven't got a driving license. It's useless to me. I ordered this car and thought, *By the time they build it, I will have passed my driving test*. By the time I got a call saying they were delivering it, I'd forgotten all about it. Outside my house was this fucking £110,000 Jag. I couldn't even remember ordering it.

How many pints can you handle before you're on your knees?
WOODY2004, DURHAM, U.K.
I can drink all fucking day and night and it doesn't put a dent in me.

What are the most typically British things about you?
LANDON, KENI, BERKSHIRE, U.K.
My sense of humor and my sense of style. We might have shit teeth, but we've got better clothes and better music, and that's the end of that.

What are the three things you do when you check into a hotel room?
KLAPADAM, FORDOCHE, LA
I phone home and see how my girlfriend and kids are, then I get in the shower and check out my surroundings. I love hotels. I love being in America when the football season's on. I'm probably the only Englishman who understands the rules of American football. I was on acid one night when I was a teenager, and I just got it. It was a revelation. Never got baseball, though. Fuck that. It goes on for fucking hours.

I'm handing you a gun with four bullets. Do you take out Radiohead or do you take out Coldplay?
SETFREESIMON, DAYTONA BEACH, FL
I'd take out neither. Chris Martin's a friend of mine. And I think Radiohead's guitarist, Jonny Greenwood, is a fucking genius. Every time I see them live they blow me away. But Radiohead are not as good as people think they are. They've been making the same record for the last five years, if you ask me.

Why can't I ever find any good new rock bands? Every time I turn on the radio, it's nothing but rap. What the fuck is happening?
MPH1978, AMSTERDAM, NY
There's still a lot of good rock & roll: Black Mountain are incredible, Mando Diao, a band from North London called the Jim Jones Revue. Unfortunately, we live in the age of rap and R&B. Don't listen to the radio, that's my advice.

I've read that you and your brother don't speak to your dad. What was the last straw that made you decide to end the relationship?
ATHOMEPAP, ANAHEIM, CA
He was a violent man, and violence toward my mother was the last straw. We were teenagers. It makes me fervently believe in the cosmic law of karma—little did he know that 15 years from that point, his two sons were going to be in one of the biggest fucking bands ever to come out of England. I sit and chuckle about that sometimes.

UNION JACK 'N' COKE: LIKE GALLAGHER, WINEHOUSE CAN DRINK 24/7. UNLIKE GALLAGHER, IT PUTS A DENT IN HER.

WINEHOUSE: DAVE M. BENETT/GETTY IMAGES.

What will Amy Winehouse be doing in two years?
WHUDDASHAMEY, MUNSTER, IN
Who gives a shit? People like that have got no pride in themselves. My message to her would be: Go make another record, or did the pressure of this one fry your little brain so you became a junkie? I don't care for fuck-ups.

When will you finally make a solo album?
PIL, NUUK, GREENLAND
I'd like for us to do separate projects after this record. We'd all have to agree on it, so it will probably never happen. I've got loads of new songs. Somewhat predictably, they're all brilliant.

I was close to the front at your Arena Newcastle gig on the *Don't Believe the Truth* tour. I had a sleeveless Nike vest on. You looked at me funny. Did the top make me look gay?
MARLEY_URWIN, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, U.K.
I would have thought so, yeah. Sleeveless tops are a no-no.

I read you held up a corner shop when you were a kid. What kind of weapon did you have? And what's a corner shop?
CHARLEEBITEZ, JANESVILLE, MN
I didn't "hold up" the corner shop. We don't do weapons in England. A corner shop is just a grocery store on the corner. Two ladies ran it, and I think we robbed a load of cigarettes and sold them to buy drugs. [Looks guilty.] I got caught.

What's the most important thing for me to remember if I get into a fight?
TIMBOSLYCE, RICHMOND, VA
Make sure the other guy's not carrying a knife. Do I still fight Liam? Yeah. The only way anyone will win is who dies first. When he's 87 years old, if he dies before me, I'll say, "See?"

How would your third album, *Be Here Now*, have turned out if you hadn't discovered cocaine?
NATHANPUTTICK, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA
It would have been a lot shorter, and it would have had better lyrics. The royalties were coming in from *Morning Glory*—we were rich, and we went bananas, doing more drugs than any Colombian. Can I just point out that *Be Here Now* did sell 9.5 million copies? If any band sells 9.5 million albums this year, I'll fucking shit in my trousers. ■

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FIVE-CARD STUDS (FROM LEFT): CALEB, NATHAN (OBSCURED), JARED AND MATTHEW FOLLOWILL TRY THEIR LUCK.

COLLECT CALL FROM ...

KINGS OF LEON

EACH MONTH, ONE LUCKY ROCK BAND PHONES *BLENDER* HQ FOR SEVEN DAYS STRAIGHT, JUST TO, YOU KNOW, SHARE. NOW ON THE LINE: HARD-PARTYING BAND OF BROTHERS KINGS OF LEON

BY JOSH EELLS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARTHA CAMARILLO

DAY 1

JULY 26, 4:59 P.M.

Drummer Nathan Followill phones from his Nashville home, where he's enjoying a marathon of HBO's *Rome*.

"Sorry if I'm a little groggy. I'm hung over as shit. Last night, me and the guys went to see *Step Brothers*. I got so high that I forgot my glasses—I had to wear my sunglasses. Afterward, we went to a bar to play shuffleboard, and me and [singer] Caleb [Followill] got way too drunk and almost killed each other. One of us is a sore loser. I'm not naming any names; I'll just say he's our lead singer, and he's my brother.

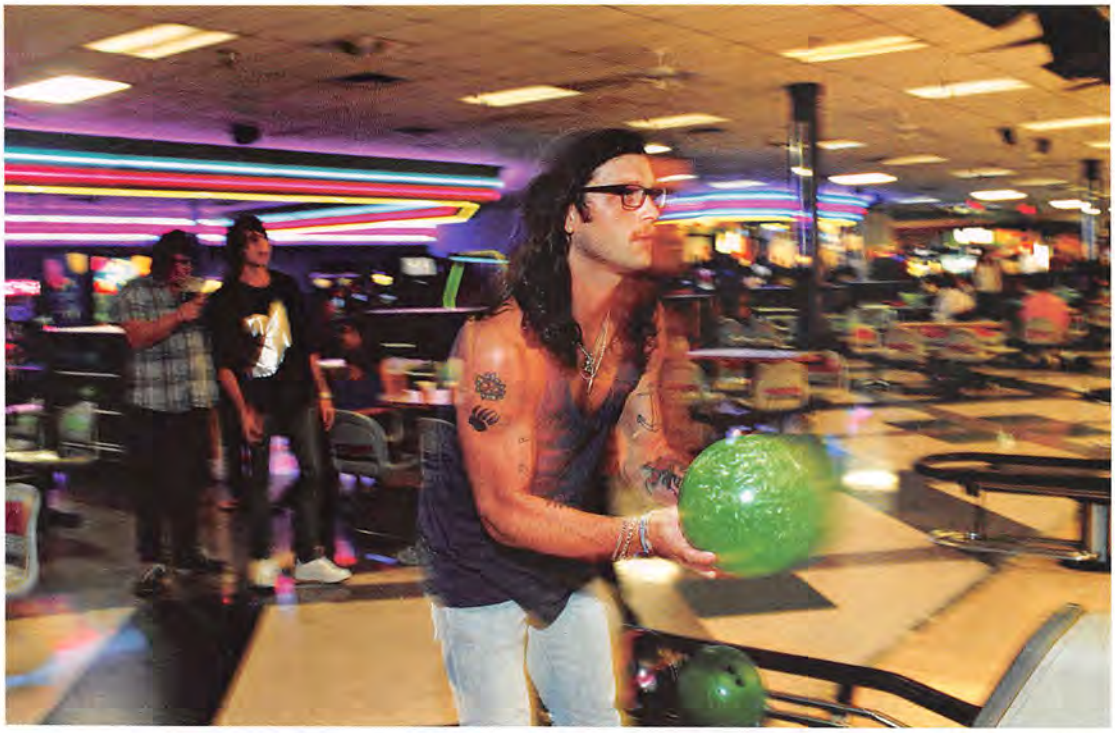
"We were supposed to go to a beer festival today, but it got rained out. Instead I'm having my own beer festival at home. I started the day with a Michelob Ultra at 9 A.M.—my girl was like, 'What the fuck?' I just turned 29, so I've been drinking professionally for eight years now, but today's the first time I've really respected the alcohol. Man, I am suffering the *wrath*. Getting older sucks."

DAY 2

JULY 27, 1:01 P.M.

Middle brother Caleb rings us from home, a Sierra Nevada in hand.

"I'm pretty buzzed right now. There's this Mexican restaurant up the road from my house: They open at 11, and I usually have a margarita in my hand by 11:05. Now I'm back home drinking some +



NATHAN FOLLOWILL: "BOW BEFORE MY FLUORESCENT BALLS!"

beer and waiting for my buddies to come over and play foosball. I got a new game-slash-sunroom—it's so bright you don't even have to turn on the lights. I've been trying to do my part to go green, like leaving the lights off when I go to the bathroom. It's good for the Earth, but it sucks for my cleaning lady.

"Later, my mom's coming over to give me a haircut. She's not as good as a professional barber, but she's free—and barbershops don't usually let you go in drunk. Then Nathan and me are going with our stepdad to check out some land we bought on the Caney Fork River, in east Tennessee. We're gonna put up some cabins and build a little fly-fishing lodge. I think Al Gore lives a little ways up the river, so I hope he's cool with it. If not I'll just tell him how green I am. Like, *Come on, Al—I shit in the dark!*"

DAY 3

JULY 28, 4:02 P.M.

Bassist Jared Followill, the youngest, dials from home, where he's awaiting delivery of his new Nissan Skyline GT-R, a 480 hp Japanese sports car.

"Those guys went out to the river yesterday, huh? Guess they forgot to call me. It's cool, though. I hung out with [guitarist] Matthew [Followill] and one of our friends. Our girlfriends are away, so we had a guys' night. We went to this bar we'd never been to before. It was all bikers, and they served no liquor, only beer. We got pretty wasted. At one point we walked over to this sketchy gas station to get some Tums, and there were a couple of guys in house shoes and gigantic T-shirts yelling at us. It was pretty salty.

"This morning I've been wasting time on the Internet. Right now I'm checking out Partyhardcore.com. Yeah, it's a porn site—$9.95 a month. What can I say? I told you my girlfriend was out of town."

DAY 4

JULY 29, 4:59 P.M.

Cousin Matthew Followill calls from his living room with the latest update.

"Today's a work day. We've been doing a bunch of conference calls, trying to get the record ready, finalize cover art, decide who's gonna shoot the video. After I get off the phone with you, we have meetings with a couple of video directors. Hopefully, one of them will blow our minds, 'cause Lord knows we've never had a good video.

"I've got a house full of women right now. My mom's in town for a week, and my grandma and little sister came up, too. I love it—I came home today and the whole place was clean. I just wish

"THIS AFTERNOON I PLAYED OUR NEW RECORD FOR MY CLEANING LADY. SHE LOVED IT. THEN AGAIN, SHE'S OUR COUSIN."
–NATHAN FOLLOWILL

BRO-MO SAPIENS: THE FOLLOWILLS CHILLAX IN CALEB'S NASHVILLE BACKYARD.

they'd chill on the food. We're from the South, so it's butter and cheese on everything. My mom makes this chicken casserole with cheese and spaghetti—oh my God. It's delicious, but I'm gonna weigh 200 pounds before the week is up."

DAY 5

JULY 30, 5:02 P.M.

Nathan calls from his kitchen, where he's nursing a beer and recovering from a rough day at the gym.

"I worked out with my trainer this morning—he kicked my ass pretty good. Squats and lunges with 45-pound dumbbells. I think he was trying to kill me. It's the first time in months I've lifted something heavier than a six-pack.

"My lady left this morning, so I'm having a bunch of the boys over tonight to play a little Texas Hold 'Em. It's a $250 buy-in, winner takes all. We're gonna smoke some Cohiba Robustos I picked up in Europe, and I just got a mastered copy of our new record, so we'll get a few drinks in everyone and get their honest opinions. I listened to it this afternoon for the first time with my cleaning lady, and she loved it. Then again, she's our cousin."

DAY 6

AUGUST 1, 12:13 P.M.

After skipping a day due to complications arising from too much Jameson, Caleb checks in on his way home from another round of midday margaritas.

"Sorry about last night—I was pretty far gone. The guys and me went bowling with our cousin Nacho. It was the first time I'd drunk pitchers of beer in a while. I started out slow, but then I got *hot*. My hips are *killing* me today. I'm pretty sure Nathan bowled the high game with a 179, but the last hour is kind of a blur.

"I contemplated calling this service where they come on a moped and drive your car home for you, but I wasn't too stoked about having a greasy moped in my trunk. To tell you the truth, I'm not sure *how* I got home.

"Oh yeah, the poker game. Matt and I both lost pretty early, going all-in when we really shouldn't have. Nathan and Jared went at it for a couple of hours, and finally they decided to just split the pot 60/40. Which is a pretty pussy way to go out, if you ask me."

DAY 7

AUGUST 2, 8:14 P.M.

Jared rings one last time on his way home from rehearsing for the band's upcoming tour.

"Caleb said Nathan bowled the high score? Bullshit! I bowled a 214. I figured he'd leave me out. He was too wasted to know what was going on anyway.

"I'm still a little hung over from last night. It was my girlfriend's birthday, so our mom cooked and everyone came over. I drank two bottles of wine and some He'Brew beer called the Rejewvenator. I don't know if it's kosher, but it's delicious. Afterward we got into a heated game of Cranium—us versus the girlfriends. The girls won.

"This is one of probably six weeks we'll have off the whole year, so we try to kick back. We have another rehearsal tomorrow, then a final mastering session, then we fly to L.A. to shoot a video and New York to start our tour. The road is fun, but every day out there is stressful. I would love for this to be my life. Cereal, beer and the PS3. I'd be an overweight 40-year-old who lives with his mom, and I'd be happy as can be."

STATION TO STATION BY ROB SHEFFIELD

MUSIC FROM MURDERLAND

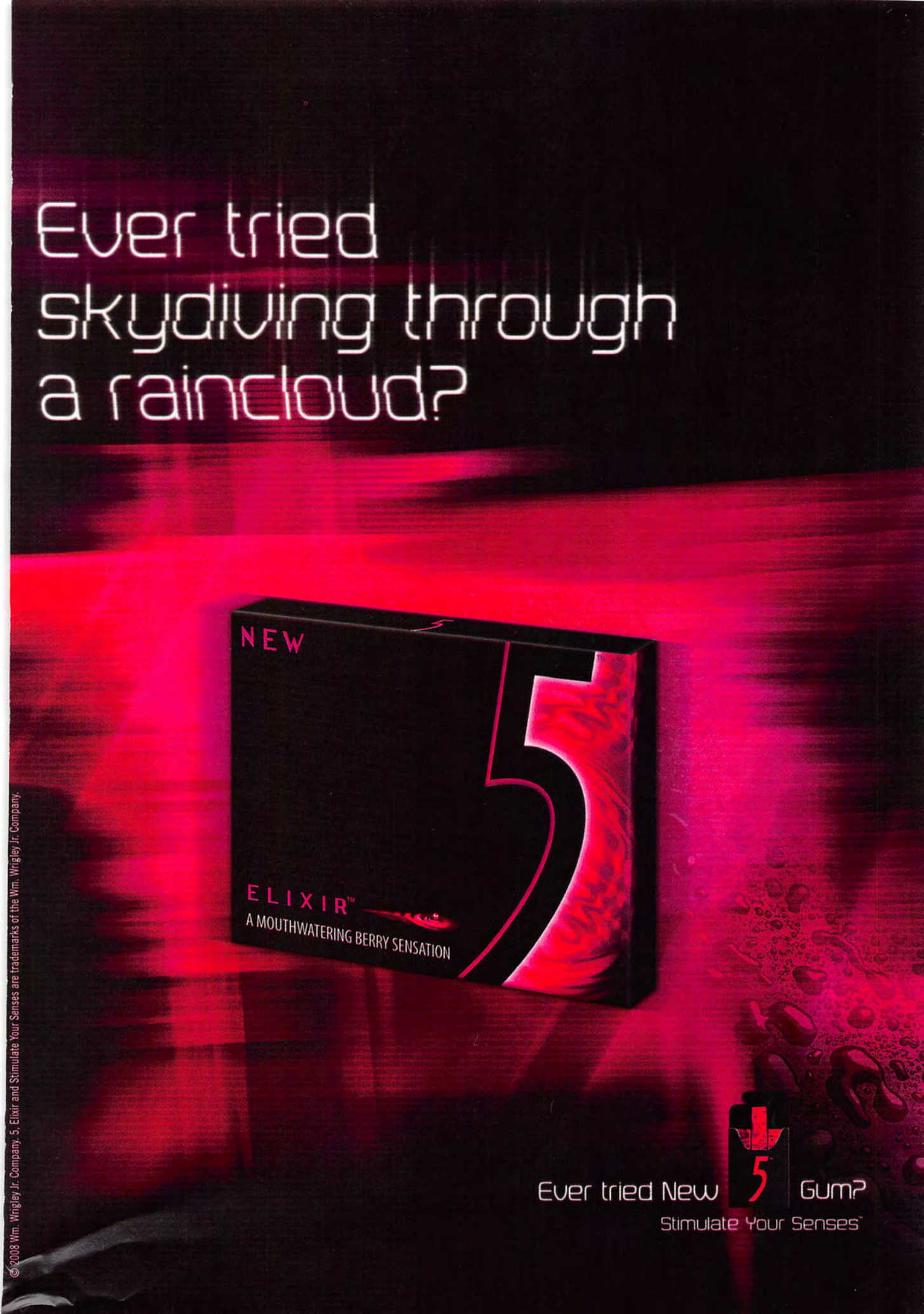
WHY ARE SO MANY OF TODAY'S HOTTEST YOUNG ART-PUNK BANDS COMING OUT OF BALTIMORE? BECAUSE WHEN THERE'S NOTHING ELSE TO DO, YOU MAKE YOUR OWN FUN

WHAT IS BALTIMORE FAMOUS FOR? *THE WIRE.* Nightmarish crime rates. John Waters. The '70s sitcom *Hot L Baltimore*. Being mentioned in James Brown's "Night Train" between Richmond and Philly. And the most punk-rock baseball manager of all time, Earl Weaver, who used to get so mad after the Orioles lost, he would sit on the locker-room safe and dare any man to come get his wallet. But in general, Bodymore, Murderland, isn't the kind of town people get sentimental about after they leave, like Minneapolis or Seattle. It's not a town where people romanticize the mean streets, like Detroit. Yet in 2008, it's a town full of music with a curiously nervous energy, thanks to hot young art-punk bands like Ponytail, Santa Dads, Thank You, Celebration and more. There might be a Manchester-style *24 Hour Party People* thing going on here—the grimmer the industrial wasteland, the more desperate the party.

Just a few years ago, it would have seemed insane to make a pilgrimage to Baltimore to hear music, kind of like scoping the Vermont barbecue scene. But one late-July weekend, the Whartscape festival is crawling with bands I've been jonesing to see live. (Many of them are hitting the road in October as part of the Baltimore Round Robin tour.) Whartscape is held in a parking lot surrounded by barbed wire, in a rundown neighborhood full of liquor stores, strip clubs and preachers. (TRY JESUS—IF U DON'T LIKE HIM, THE DEVIL WILL ALWAYS TAKE U BACK, advises the sign outside Solid Rock Free Will Baptist Church.) The city definitely lives up to its reputation. On my walk home, around 3, I see a guy on North Avenue who looks like Fred Willard, trying to tie his shoes. Every time he bends over, he grabs for his shoelaces and falls over on the sidewalk. Three times, four times—and the weird part is, he's wearing flip-flops. Party town!

Whartscape is an annual celebration from the Wham City collective, founded with tongue-in-cheek style and a deliberately doofy name by Dan Deacon and friends. Deacon has definitely helped put the city on the map, with his charismatic blend of avant-aerobics techno and show-biz hustle—he's part Russell Simmons, part Richard Simmons. But Baltimore also has the Maryland Institute College of Art, where most of these acts got started, and hip-hop powerhouse 92Q, whose beloved DJ K-Swift tragically drowned this summer, inspiring citywide mourning so profound that the mayor attended her wake and the governor attended her funeral. Even the driver on the downtown bus sings along with the radio as it plays +

ILLUSTRATION BY SIGGI EGGERTSSON AT BIG ACTIVE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A Wham City Sampler

Six Baltimore Bands That Will Rock Your World!

PONYTAIL: THEY MET IN PAINTING CLASS, OF COURSE.

- **Ecstatic Sunshine "Perrier"** Aw, that's nice. Are those wind chimes? Hey, this sounds like a happy day at the beach. Fluffy clouds. Ow! Feedback! My brain hurts! For 10 minutes. Cool.
- **Beach House "Gila"** After they played at the Whartscape festival, everybody was buzzing about how they actually stood up during their set, which is a bold move for this mega-chill boy-girl folk-drone duo.
- **Ponytail "Beg Waves"** Punk rock in relentless body-moving mode, kind of like Donna Summer's "I Feel Love," except with vocals in intergalactic-warrior code and rhythms designed to crush the spine.
- **Thank You "Terrible Two"** Nine full minutes of utterly eardrum-pulverizing, DNA-scrambling, will-to-live-sucking robot noise, with gobs and gobs of organ, drums and forehead-meets-windshield guitar.
- **Lexie Mountain Boys "Sweet Potato Sugar Tot"** Self-described as "five women gurgling, burbling, relating," this song sounds like a coven of witches draining a tank of nitrous and riffing on "Pump Up the Jam" a cappella. Sane? No.
- **Dan Deacon "The Crystal Cat"** Loud, cheap and out of control: a blast of electro noise from his excellent 2007 album, *Spiderman of the Rings*, with cartoon voices chanting, "Gonna get my space face on" to the break of dawn.

the Stylistics' "You'll Never Get to Heaven (If You Break My Heart)." Music is in the air, maybe because it's so badly needed.

The Whartscape bill has twisted folk (Lesser Gonzalez Alvarez), druggy psychedelia (Beach House), electro glitch-blasting (Ecstatic Sunshine), a spandex-tabulous dance squad doing a disco ballet about wizards (Club Lyfestile) and five foxy ladies in fake beards doing a human-beat-box freestyle about miniature ponies (Lexie Mountain Boys). None of the musicians get the star treatment—they're all carrying amps and fixing the outdoor generators in 90 degree heat. Even Deacon hauls gear through the lot, conspicuous in his beard, glasses and orange baseball cap Sharpied with the message EARTHWORMS ARE EASY. My weekend degenerates into a no-sleep-at-all blast of dancers, DJs, noise bands, boho rappers and freakazoid bands with names like Witch Hat, Leprechaun Catering, Videohippos and Nuclear Power Pants.

My favorite is Ponytail, whose *Ice Cream Spiritual* is my most-played and most-loved album of 2008 so far, despite being basically devoid of songs and as content-free as *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*. The band bangs out electro-style rhythm loops on guitar while firecracker vocalist Molly Siegel cackles nonsense syllables, sounding like a dolphin who's a big Mary J. Blige fan. Ponytail started at MICA, in a class called Parapainting. Guitarists Ken Seeno and Dustin Wong claim they're surprised I notice that they sound like big Robert Fripp fans, but they both have mad love for old-school hippie rock. "Have you ever heard Genesis?" Wong asks me. "*Nursery Crymes*—that's a great record. You gotta check it out!" So what are they listening to in the van these days? The Grateful Dead's Phil Lesh reading his autobiography. Kids today, I swear.

Like everyone else, Ponytail give a lot of credit to Deacon for jumpstarting Baltimore's indie-music excitement. It all began with Wham City, a warehouse turned art space/love shack/party palace where a revolving cast of kids lived and made music. "We all used to go to these warehouse parties," Seeno says. "There was nowhere else to go." The whole sick Wham City crew moved to Baltimore in the summer of 2004, right after graduating from SUNY Purchase. "When we first got here, all we did for fun is get drunk, smash our possessions and cry," Blood Baby guitarist Adam Endres says. "But eventually we just started doing things and dancing all the time. I would turn on music as loud as I could and dance for two to four hours every afternoon when I woke up. We would juice fruits and vegetables we got from the Dumpster."

Shockingly, the cops took an interest and kept shutting the place down for the usual code violations, closing it for good last year. But the house-party spirit endures. Wham City thrives on enthusiasm, novelty, conceptual cheek; there's no commercial incentive to make it big, or even make it normal, so nobody takes it too seriously. (SHAM SHITTY, says a banner in the parking lot.) There's an almost superstitious fear of anything pro. It's hard to even pay for anything at the merch table, because nobody wants to act like they're on the clock. When I ask the guy from the Killer Whales which album their song "Heart Strings" is on, he tells me, "Aaah, you can probably find it online," and gives me three of his CDs for free.

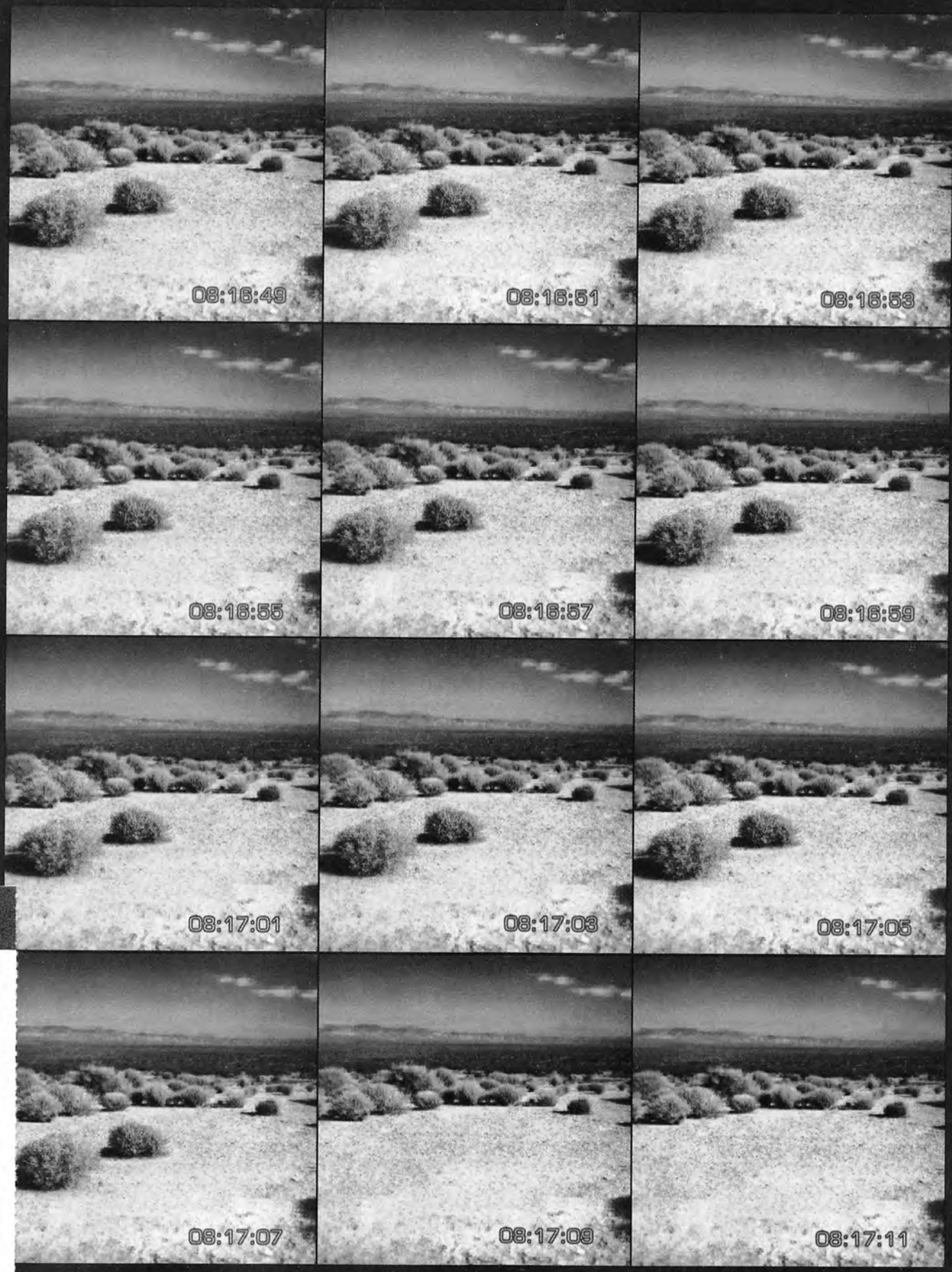
Back in the 1970s, local son David Byrne went from Baltimore to New York to do the art/music thing with Talking Heads. But with New York rezoning itself into a luxury strip mall, it makes sense the migration is headed in the other direction. Thank You guitarist Jeff McGrath was working at MICA a few years ago when Byrne came to town with a photo exhibition. "Our conversations were mostly like, 'David, here's the spackle you wanted,'" McGrath recalls. "But I remember him speaking about the city, being fascinated with the visual language of the store fronts in Mount Vernon and how deeply a place can color a person's creative work. After that, I sort of lost interest in moving away."

The house-party energy carries through the whole weekend. The big buzz at Whartscape is the debut of Dan Deacon's supergroup with rapper Spank Rock and Girl Talk DJ Gregg Gillis, who are set to play the after party on Sunday night, under the name Who Is the Tunafish Man? They're scheduled to go on at 2, in the old Wham City stomping grounds the Copycat Annex Theater. But it's the kind of gig where you can smell the sweat a block away, and you can also smell the cops. They shut down the show before it even happens, to the surprise of basically nobody. "They make rules and enforce them and don't even know the fuck why," Endres says a few days later. "They believe orders and guidelines are necessary. But we at Wham City know this to be untrue. And when the apocalypse starts, we will be prepared for the breakdown of order." B

PROJECT RUNWAY IS BURNING

It's official: *Project Runway* is in sabotage mode. It's the only explanation for how wacky this season is. The producers obviously figured, *Why keep building the best show on TV, when Harvey Weinstein wants to take it to a rival network next season?* It's like one of those Civil War movies where people torch their own farms so the Yankees can't take them. Why else recruit such a bumbling bunch of fashion wankers? They drive poor Tim Gunn to the edge of despair; each week he has a more haunted look. The judges are like a trio of leathery seniors at Denny's bickering over whose fault it is they missed the early-bird special. And Heidi Klum—five seasons in and she's still saying, "Pwoject Wunway"? Bwilliant! But also bizarrely fascinating. You'd have to return to late *Roseanne* or *Discotheque*-era U2 to see a successful franchise go kamikaze like this. "Make it work"? More like "Burn, baby, burn!"

PONYTAIL: FRANK HAMILTON; KLUM: PAUL DRINKWATER/NBCU PHOTO BANK/AP PHOTO.



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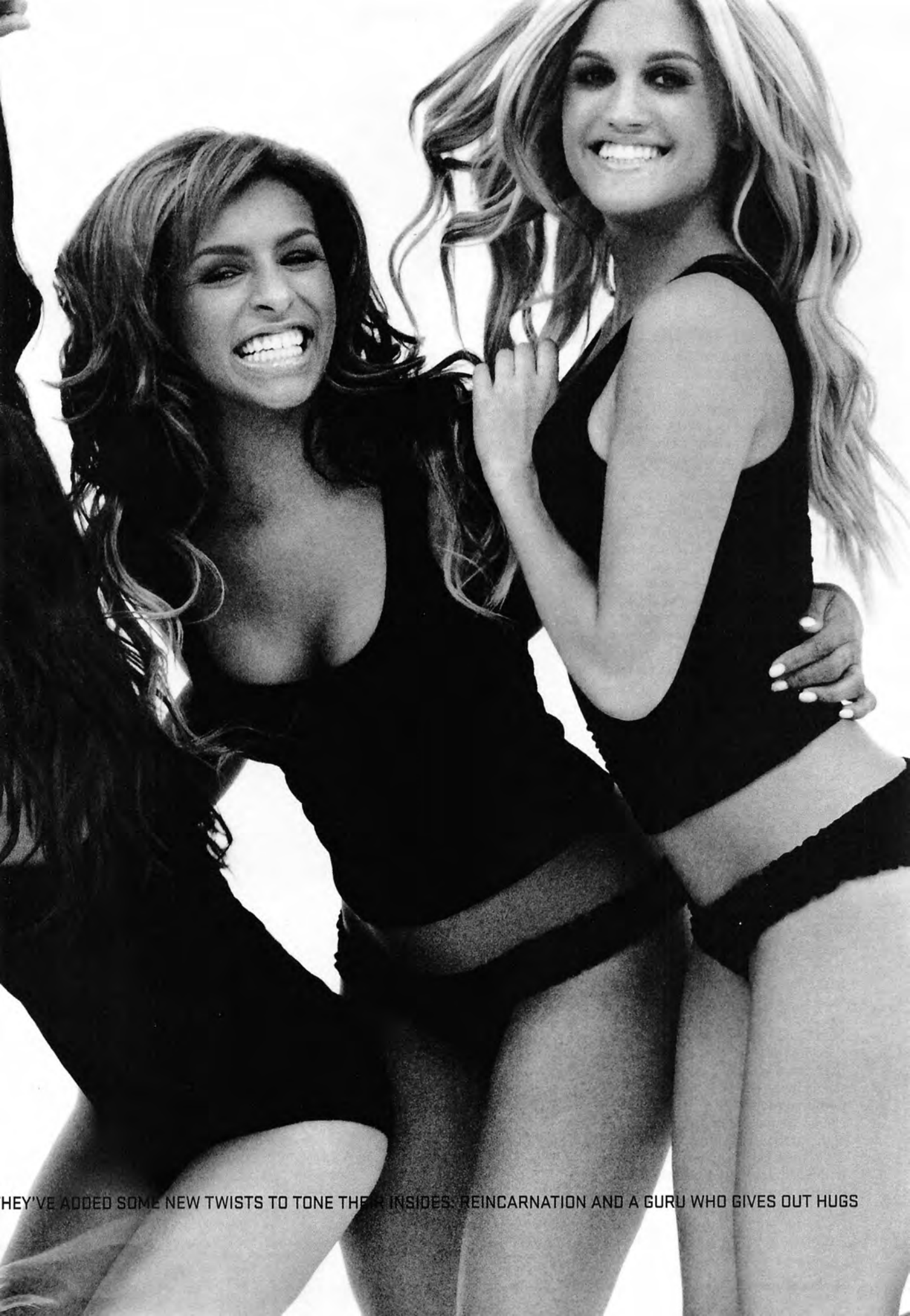
REAL DOLLS

THE PUSSYCAT DOLLS ARE THE WORLD'S SEXIEST BURLESQUE SQUAD, BUT THAT'S NOT ENOUGH. SO, ALONG WITH MUSCLE-SCULPTING WORKOUTS AND BODY-HUGGING LATE

BY DEBORAH SCHOENEMAN **PHOTOGRAPHS BY GAVIN BOND**

CAT POWER:
(FROM LEFT) KIMBERLY WYATT, NICOLE SCHERZINGER, JESSICA SUTTA, MELODY THORNTON AND ASHLEY ROBERTS.



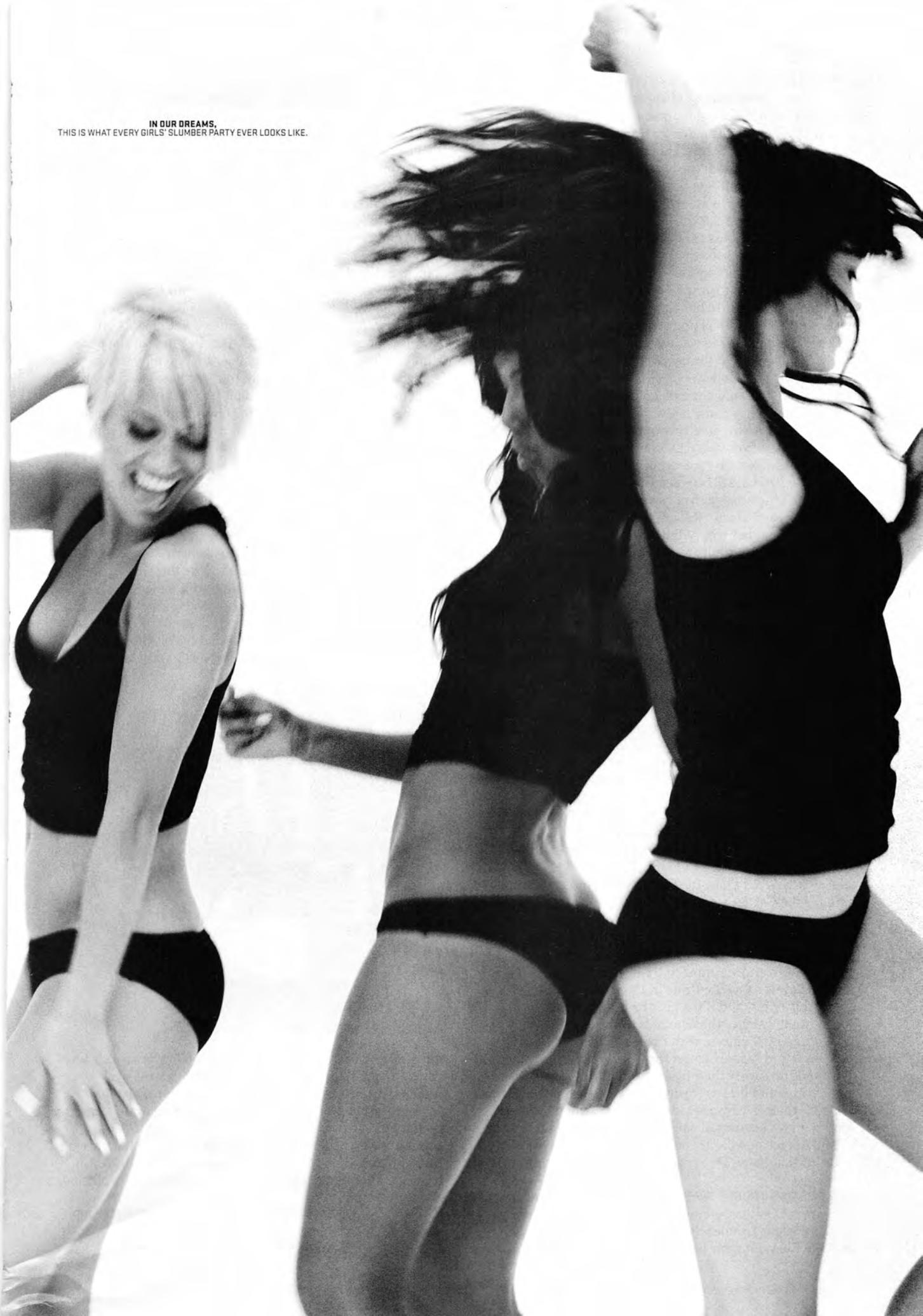
THEY'VE ADDED SOME NEW TWISTS TO TONE THEIR INSIDES: REINCARNATION AND A GURU WHO GIVES OUT HUGS

HERE'S A SWEET BIRTHDAY PRESENT:

getting to be a Pussycat Doll for a night. That's the gift a Russian banker has purchased for his wife, a trim 35-year-old blonde, at a lavish party he's throwing at The Beverly Hills Hotel. The gift has been giving for a week now—before her transformation was complete, she attended sex-kitten boot camp with the quintet's assistant choreographer, learning how to prance, gyrate, bend and spin, and finally mastering all of the above while bound in layers of sparkly latex. (OK, it doesn't sound like such a bad present for the banker, either.)

Tonight, at the party, the Pussycat Dolls gather in an upstairs suite to do their hair and makeup. They're each debuting a new look, just in time for their second album, *Doll Domination*. Kimberly Wyatt (spiky short blond hair) wears a single lightning-bolt earring and comes across like some anime biker-chick superhero. Ashley Roberts (flowing Jessica Simpson do) sports a black corset and red spandex hot pants, like a stripper on her way to the gym. Jessica Sutta (dyed red hair) taps an old-school Hollywood-pinup vibe. Melody Thornton (brunette with golden highlights) has hoop earrings with the word BABY inside them, to remind everyone that she is the group's youngest. And then there's Nicole Scherzinger—part Hawaiian, part Filipino, part Russian—dressed for a night of light aerobic bondage in a black bra, black shorts and knee-high black boots.

Before the show, they sip champagne on a sprawling terrace, taking in the city view. They've just devoured room-service mac 'n' cheese, a small act of rebellion: In addition to twice-daily workouts, the Dolls' diets have been restricted to home-delivered meals calibrated down to the calorie. But in PCD land, +



IN OUR DREAMS,
THIS IS WHAT EVERY GIRLS' SLUMBER PARTY EVER LOOKS LIKE.

being sexy means breaking the rules—these girls get paid to act out a salacious fantasy of appetite-indulging, convention-smashing female liberation, making the case with every bump 'n' grind performance that you can't spell *midriff* without *id*—so, tonight, mac 'n' cheese is sexy.

As they walk through the hotel kitchen to the ballroom, they're wearing elaborate Venetian masks—red, blue and leopard print. They invite the birthday girl to join them in a pre-show huddle ("1,2,3: PCD!") before bounding onto the stage, cheerleaders as styled by a classroom of 14-year-old boys. Halfway through "Don't Cha"—the 2005 single that introduced them to the world as down-for-whatever, boyfriend-snatching nymphs—they rip off the masks, revealing the birthday girl to her cheering guests. If her father is here, let's hope he's taking a cigarette break right now.

"That party made me want to plan my wedding," says Jessica, a 26-year-old former Miami Heat dancer, the next morning in West Hollywood. The Dolls are at a photo shoot for their album cover. A Pomeranian pants happily in Jessica's lap. "They really know how to live life," she says.

Nicole sits nearby, quietly communing with her BlackBerry. She's just back from two days off in Santa Barbara with her boyfriend, British race-car driver Lewis Hamilton, who lives in Switzerland. There is a small cut on her lip—a tiny flaw in an otherwise perfect canvas, as her makeup artist calls her face. "I always feel guilty when I take a day off," is all she'll say about her trip. When asked to confirm her age, she begrudgingly admits to recently turning 30. "I should say I'm 27," she sighs. (The Dolls Web site is equally conflicted—on one page, Nicole is 28; on another, she's 30.)

In the next room, blond BFFs Ashley, 27, and Kimberly, 26, are trying to figure out just how many red roses were at the party last night. "I think, like, 75,000," Ashley says. "There were some peach ones, too," adds Melody, 24, as she starts to blow dry her hair. The Dolls play private gigs several times a month. On the low end are corporations with a liberal interpretation of the phrase "team-building exercise." On the high-end are multimillionaires who can afford to fly an international pop sensation overseas to entertain a roomful of their closest friends. The money is good (sometimes $1 million for 40 minutes of work), and the group enjoys ruthless pampering. "At these parties," Melody says, "the pool will be filled with Evian. Over there is the princess of ... I forget ... Libya? Huge rocks everywhere—you *know* they're not fake. And you might get a Cartier watch at the end."

On the small of her back, Melody is wearing something that's not very sexy, so it's not very PCD: two round Band-Aids. She's been getting shots of antibiotics and vitamins to try to knock out a virus. There isn't a lot of time in Pussycat Doll world for illness, and if the girls have a struggle, it's trying to balance the demands of the ever-expanding PCD empire with their own lives: to be both Doll and human, to get those Cartier watches and find husbands, to satisfy their desire for fame and their desire for spiritual fulfillment (really—more on that shortly). It isn't simple, which is why a few days earlier Melody had dark circles under her eyes, a woman trying to ward off disease through force of will. "If you get sick, it's easy to feel sorry for yourself," she says. "Depression is prevalent in this industry."

THE RUSSIAN TROPHY WIFE IS ONLY THE LATEST IN A LONG LINE of Pussycat Doll stage-crashers. Back when PCD were an L.A. burlesque troupe with residencies at the Viper Room and the Roxy, Carmen Electra, Pam Anderson and Christina Applegate—who used to room with the group's founder, Robin Antin—took on gigs as honorary Dolls. In 2002, Gwen Stefani brought Interscope Records honchos Jimmy Iovine and Ron Fair to a show and, soon after, the label signed them, shaking up the personnel and re-envisioning PCD as a pop sextet. Their 2005 debut melded slithery, contemporary R&B to the sort of single entendres a housewife might say to her pool boy in a soft-core porno. It went on to sell 7 million copies worldwide.

The question eternally on Antin's mind is how to keep "growing the brand." There's still a PCD troupe that dances at the Pussycat Dolls lounge at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas; a new lounge opens in late September in West Hollywood. "I want to get Victoria Beckham to perform at the opening, people are so fascinated with her," Antin says. She oversees all things PCD, so she's here at the photo studio. A lingerie line, a denim line, a CW reality show, lounges—those have come easy, too. But here's a taller order: Each of the girls wants to go solo. "It's what we've been waiting for," Kimberly says. "We all want individual success."

On *Doll Domination*, each Pussycat gets her own song. But as recent experience reveals, it's not easy to pull a Gwen and cut loose from the pack. Last year, Nicole Scherzinger was supposed to launch her own solo career with *Her Name Is Nicole*—after two singles flopped, the project was shelved. "I decided to hold off," Nicole says, although that decision was obviously made for her. An elemental rule of showbiz is, if you trip, keep smiling. As she recalls her solo stumble, she's positively beaming: "I didn't want to lose the momentum of the PCD. That train's been moving so fast."

"It's not that she didn't have good songs," says will.i.am, the Black Eyed Peas mastermind who produced the song "Beep" on PCD's first album. "The reason that Nicole didn't take off was bad planning. No one knew Nicole was going to put out a record, because they didn't develop her as an individual when the Pussycat Dolls were at their height, the way we did with Fergie." In other words: no humps, no glory.

THE DOLLS SHARE A GURU IN THE SAME WAY THEY SHARE A TRAINER.

"We want the world to get to know them separately, but the bottom line is that the fans see what they want to see," says Antin, 47, who used to dance with the Dolls but gave up the spotlight when they started recording. Recently, Antin has been offering her charges a new kind of advice: spiritual.

PUSSYCATS GALORE: TO SEE EXCLUSIVE VIDEO OF OUR COVER SHOOT, OUTTAKES AND MORE LOLPUSSYCATS, GO TO **BLENDER.COM**.

PREVIOUS TWO SPREADS: STYLING: JEWELS FOR MAGNET LA; HAIR: CLYDE HAYGOOD FOR MARGARET MALDONADO, FRANKIE PAYNE FOR OPUS BEAUTY, RANDY STODGHILL; MAKEUP: TROY JENSEN FOR MARGARET MALDONADO, MATHU ANDERSEN FOR MARGARET MALDONADO, THERESE

LOL PUSSYCATS

Quick, what's the best thing about the Internet? If you guessed "ridiculously captioned cat photos," you're right! Inspired by feline viral phenomenon ICanHasCheezburger.com, we gave our feline cover stars the LOLcat treatment.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: FRANK MICELOTTA/GETTY IMAGES; ASHLEY ROBERTS/SPLASH NEWS; CHRIS WEEKS/WIREIMAGE.

"We've all gotten into this book, *Many Lives, Many Masters*. It's about reincarnation, finding your soul mate, and people who are in your lives for a reason," Antin says. The Doll world is a closed one—12-hour workdays leave little time for civilian friends, and the group celebrates birthdays and holidays together—meaning they take all this "for a reason" stuff very seriously. "I think we all knew each other in a different life," Melody says. Evidence for this includes: She and Ashley each play with their hair the exact same way, and a psychic once confirmed their eternal bond to Jessica.

The Dolls share a guru the same way they share a trainer: Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, a 54-year-old humanitarian and spiritualist from Southern India known as Amma the Hugging Saint. Amma holds what must be a world record for hugging more than 50,000 people in one 20-hour stretch. In addition to hugs, she spreads a message of self-sacrifice, community service and the egoless contentment that "comes from devotion, love and utter surrender to the Supreme Lord."

The Dolls haven't quite gotten there yet; they've started with jewelry blessed by Amma. Nicole—who's the most traditionally religious, going to church almost every Sunday—wears it alongside a bracelet dotted with antique Catholic charms. Ashley has an Amma necklace. "It feels so pure and honest, so female. I think she's the divine mother," she says, widening her puppy-dog brown eyes. "I had no religion growing up, but I think it's important to believe in a faith that is bigger than you. It helps you stay grounded with your work."

Kimberly has gone a step further. She had a Sanskrit mantra inked on the back of her neck: *Lokah Samasthah Sukhino Bhavantu* ("May all beings in the world be peaceful and happy"). It's a popular prayer often used at the end of yoga classes. She got it from a T-shirt she ordered from TheAmmaShop.org. A few years ago, Kimberly—known for throwing her leg up over her head in practically every PCD video and photo shoot—almost converted to Judaism, but lately she's been studying Buddhism. "I know everything is meant to be," she says.

All of this metaphysicality might seem more George Harrison than Pussycat Doll, but it's a good indication of the place the girls hold in the L.A. celebrity firmament, where Kabbalah prayer centers and Scientology churches need their own VIP sections. And as is the L.A. way, it's religion as self-actualization. Ashley mixes her Amma necklace with a bracelet that says LIVE YOUR DREAMS she got at Kitson, a trendy L.A. boutique. She bought one for Kimberly too, that says, BELIEVE IN YOU.

FROM THE PURSUITS OF THE SOUL TO THE DEMANDS OF THE flesh: With their new CD on the way, the Dolls have been put on a grueling exercise regimen that causes severe neck and back pain and requires the services of a deep-tissue masseuse. They move around a room wearing nothing but thongs with a comfort most girls reserve for a night at home in sweat pants. But thongs are one thing. The latex-heavy look that accompanies *Doll Domination* means the Dolls have to get powdered and lubed just to slip in and out of their outfits.

"The Dolls are modern-day Kiss meets the Power Rangers," their manager Jeff Haddad says. But as they get ready for their cover shoot, it's hard not to think of them as life-size mannequins, being primped and posed and getting their hair extensions tended to by a crew of about 20. At one point, a makeup artist picks up Ashley in her arms to take her to get her face painted.

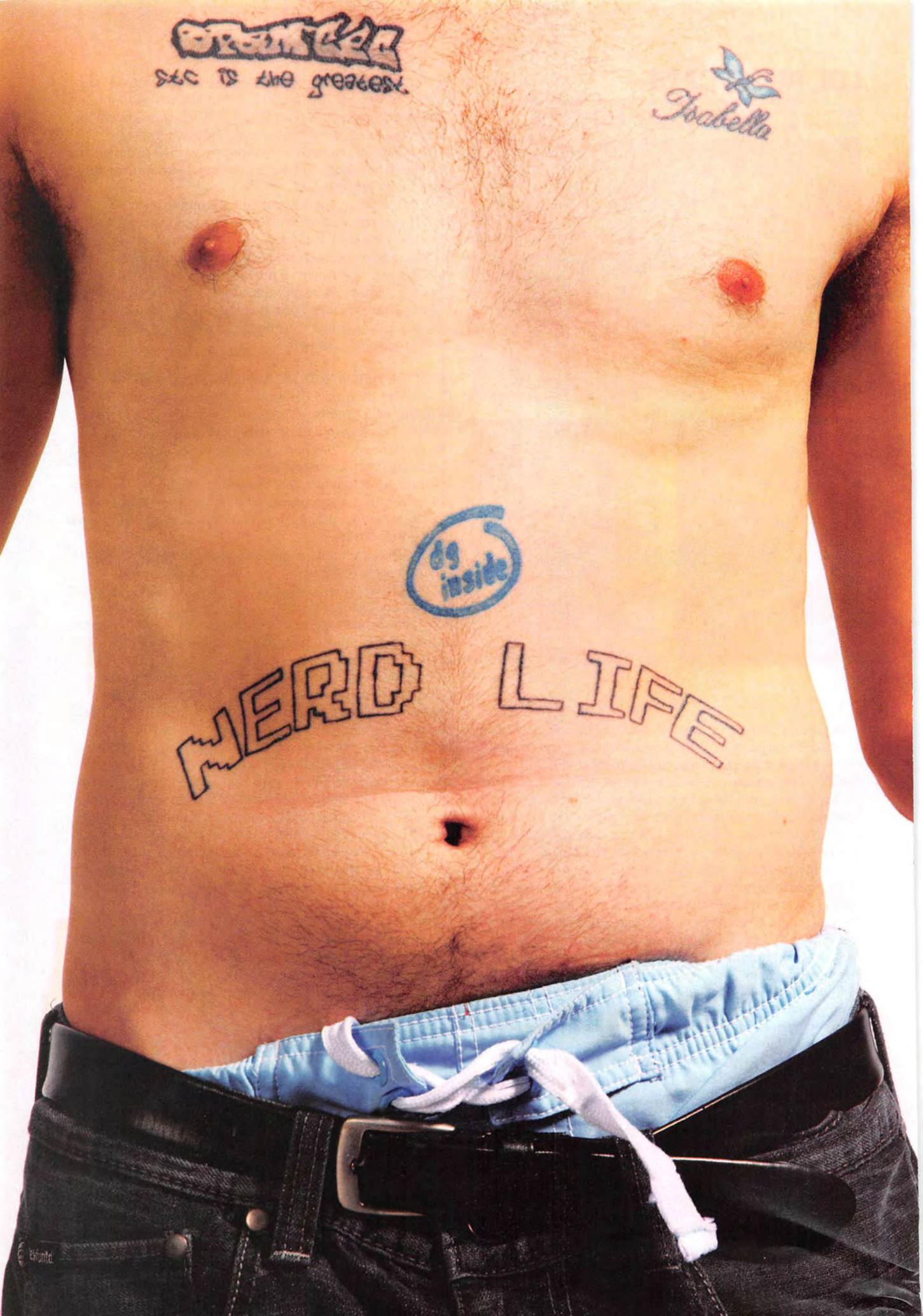
During one costume change, Nicole's boyfriend, Lewis Hamilton, looks on with something like amazement and annoyance. He met Nicole at the MTV Europe Music Awards last year. "I never knew how long it could take to get ready," he says quietly. He has less interest in watching Nicole work it for the camera than checking out Haddad's new white Mercedes. While the girls are inside applying makeup and getting into skintight clothes, all the guys gather in the parking lot and Haddad encourages Hamilton to rev the engine hard enough to burn rubber and create smoke.

Afterward, Lewis Web surfs on his laptop for rims for Haddad's car. Nicole emerges in a black latex cat suit and sequined pink bra. She curls up on Lewis's lap. He barely takes his eyes off his screen.

Another costume, another group shot. Nicole scowls unhappily. All the other Dolls are in micro outfits suited for shimmying in front of the camera. She's trapped in a long strapless fuchsia latex dress and towering Fendi heels. "I can't move," Nicole complains as the flash starts strobing. The photographer tries to coax her into some sexy poses, but she's frozen.

"This is bullshit," mutters Nicole, strutting off the set, an act of rebellion a few clicks higher than last night's mac 'n' cheese binge.

Robin Antin, who's been sitting in a chair on the sidelines, pops up to lure her back. The lubed-and-powdered Doll machine has sputtered to a halt. The music stops, and Ashley whimpers for it to come back on. When it finally does, she and Kimberly start moving again, like someone has plugged them back in. Melody pulls her ponytail up high and Jessica lunges on a white box. Nicole returns and, dress be damned, starts grinding to the beat as much as the latex will allow. Pussycat harmony restored. Their fake hair flies in the artificial wind. B


Isabella
dg inside
NERD LIFE

On this hot July evening, the parking lot of the Taste restaurant in Orlando, Florida, looks like the set of a Fellini film—if Fellini had been an '80s baby weaned on Nintendo NES, *Star Wars* and superhero comic books. A crew of hulking silver robots lumber about the lot. A pirate captain takes a drag on a cigarette. A pair of Harry Potters unload their van, while a man-size creature with a forest green head and a huge mouthful of bright-yellow teeth shakes hands and pantomimes excitement. This fanboy fantasia unfolds at the tail end of Nerdapalooza Southeast 2008, a two-day celebration of "nerd music," which encompasses everything from J.K. Rowling–inspired "wizard rock" to video-game-song cover bands. But what's ripped most of the 300 mainly white, male attendees away from their computer screens for the weekend are the bill's two dozen nerdcore hip-hop acts, who spit rhymes about all-night coding sessions, *Battlestar Galactica* and sexual congress with the princess from *Super Mario Brothers*. "I don't identify with a lot of regular hip-hop: selling drugs, shooting people," says computer-security analyst David Martinjak, who performs in the twosome Dual Core under the name int eighty (it's a Linux reference—ask your IT guy). "I write programs, hack into stuff. Here, you don't have to worry about what people will think because you like comic books and video games."

THE GEEK SQUAD

THIS PAGE:
HARRY AND THE POTTERS, Norwood, MA
"I perform as Harry Potter from year four at Hogwarts," explains wizard-rocker Joe DeGeorge (left). "I'm Harry, year seven," adds older brother Paul (right). "We didn't want to fight over who got to be Harry, so we decided that we'll both be him and use time travel as an explanation."

OPPOSITE:
YTCRACKER, Colorado Springs, CO
A reformed hacker—at 16, he was busted for defacing NASA's Web site—and onetime spam king, YT (a.k.a. Bryce Casey Jr.) is the closest nerdcore gets to gangsta rap. "I got the NERD LIFE tattoo on the seventh anniversary of Tupac's death," he says. "When conspiracy theorists thought he was going to come back."

A PHOTO REPORT FROM A FESTIVAL OF PASTY-FACED MUSIC MAKING: **NERDAPALOOZA**, TWO DAYS OF PEACE, LOVE AND SONGS ABOUT COMPUTER PROGRAMMING
BY MARK YARM • **PHOTOGRAPHS BY TODD SELBY**

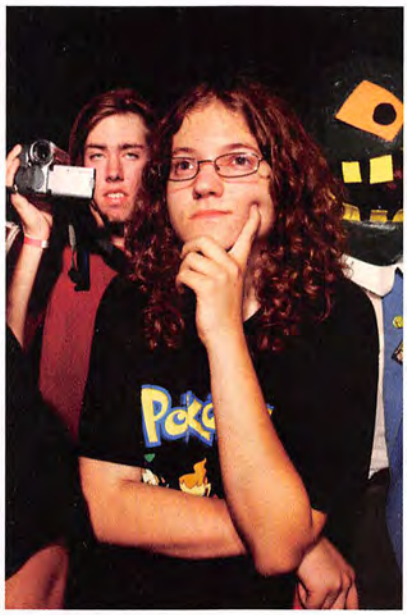
ZOMBIES! ORGANIZE!!, Boca Raton, FL
"All our songs are about zombies," says keytarist Lil' Bobby Deadie (a.k.a. Bobby Jividen, center). "We have songs where zombies eat your brains. But we also have a lot of songs where consumers are zombies, people in political parties are zombies, celebutantes are zombies."

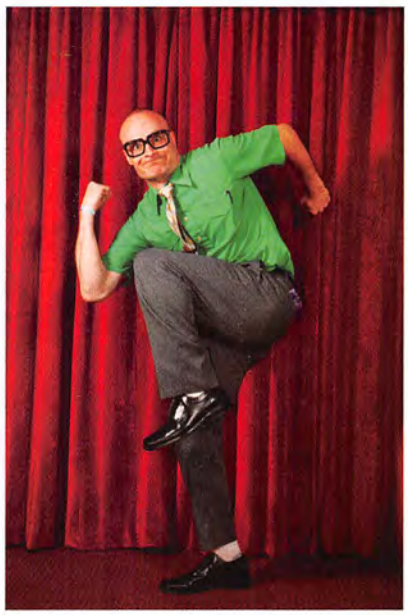
THE KILLER ROBOTS!, Orlando, FL
"We have a movie coming out!" enthuses Ishiro Automatron (Earth name: Sam Gaffin; far right), bassist for the Gwar-meets-Transformers hard rockers. "It's called *Killer Robots and the Battle for the Cosmic Potato*. It'll probably go straight to DVD."

UNCLE MONSTERFACE, Brooklyn, NY
Asked how he's enjoying Nerdapalooza, Uncle Monsterface (right) grunts and claps his hands (he doesn't speak "human"). The zany rockers' frontman, Marty Allen (center), translates: "He said, 'It's like riding a rainbow on the back of a robotic unicorn.'"

ARCHITECTS OF FEAR, Titusville, FL
"Our name is a reference to an *Outer Limits* episode—that's pretty nerdy," says guitarist Steve Hill (far left). "Also, our singer plays a 36-string autoharp. We write pop songs about death, like 'Don't Poke a Dead Guy.' The lyrics go, 'Don't poke a dead guy/What did he do to you?'"

STD





OPPOSITE: **SCHÄFFER THE DARKLORD, Queens, NY**
"I've always been the nerdiest in my social circle, but here I actually feel kind of hip," says rapper Mark Schaffer, whose stage name and getup are inspired by Emperor Palpatine of *Star Wars*. "This is the one place where my never having played *Magic: The Gathering* is a mark of shame."

TOP: **CAPTAIN DAN AND THE SCURVY CREW, Boynton Beach, FL**
At Nerdapalooza, these rhyming pirates and the ninja rappers Krondor Krew publicly squashed their longstanding beef. "We have a new common enemy," says Captain Dan Dolan (far left). "We can't disclose it yet, but it will probably be either zombies or robots."

BOTTOM LEFT: **RANDOM, Phoenix**
"I'd been doing traditional hip-hop for about 10 years when I released *Mega Ran*, based on the old *Mega Man* video-game series. It became my best-selling album," says Random (a.k.a. Raheem Jarbo). "At regular hip-hop events, you have to look tough and be that cool guy. I don't have to do that here!"

BOTTOM CENTER: **Festivalgoers (and Uncle Monsterface)**
"The socializing of nerds is not something you usually see, but it does happen," says fest founder and co-organizer John "hex" Carter (not pictured). "It's kind of the revenge of the nerds. We've found our own place to congregate and hang out without being judged."

BOTTOM RIGHT: **MC FRONTALOT, Brooklyn, NY**
Frontalot (Damian Hess) coined the term *nerdcore* in 2000: "I was recording raps in front of my monitor with two Robotech figurines glued to the top. I thought, *This is so the opposite of hardcore*. So I wrote the song 'Nerdcore Hip-Hop,' making fun of myself for being so worthless."

FOR VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS FROM NERDAPALOOZA, GO TO **BLENDER.COM/NERDAPALOOZA**.

33 THE MOST OVERRATED PEOPLE, PLACES, TRENDS AND OTHER JUNK IN ROCK

FROM YOUR FAVORITE BAND IN HIGH SCHOOL TO THE MOST REQUESTED SONG IN THE WORLD, *BLENDER* CALLS B***S**T ...

ILLUSTRATION BY SERIAL CUT

/ SEXIN' ALL NIGHT LONG

Usher, Keith Sweat, AC/DC, Prince ... we could go on and on about the mack daddies who brag about going on and on—hittin' it, workin' it and doing other stuff to it—until the break of dawn. Even Dokken have a song about all-night boning. Two words for all these guys: *Shyeah, right!* Have you actually ever tried sexin' it for more than, like, two hours? You get bored. You get sores. You get tired. Call us square, but unless you're Sting or a crystal-meth addict, an all-night sex marathon sounds about as fun as an all-day *Friends* marathon.

Underrated alternative: **Sexin' for 45 minutes and getting 10 hours of sleep**

32/ KISS

Memo to Gene Simmons: Either take your shirt off or put your pants on. As a band, they're about as perfunctory as Gene's sex tape—they're a tiresome, bickering circus act with a few decent glam songs.
Underrated alternative: Cheap Trick

31/ THE *IN RAINBOWS* MODEL

Record industry: evil! Paying what you want: good! But even in the "intellectual property wants to be free" age, a glorified tip jar isn't going to work for most bands—Girl Talk notwithstanding, if the act doesn't have a pretty huge fan base already, they can basically forget it. And if you look a little more closely at what Radiohead did, they actually made a lot of their money from *In Rainbows* the old-fashioned way: selling physical copies, including fancy, limited-edition versions with premium price tags.
Underrated alternative: Tour-exclusive CDs

30/ "FREEBIRD"

If Lynyrd Skynyrd's Ronnie VanZandt were alive today, he'd be rolling from town to town, beating the crap out of every last d-bag who feels the need to scream, "Freebird!" from the back row at a concert. We've got news for you, buddy, "Freebird" wasn't even Skynyrd's top six-string epic. That honor would have to go to "I Need You," from side one of *Second Helping*, highly recommended the next time you get the urge to blow your child-support check guzzling fifths of Jim Beam, playing air guitar and humping cattle. The South's gonna do it again, baby!
Underrated alternative: "I Need You"

29/ GETTING RICK RUBIN TO PRODUCE YOUR RECORD

It's not 1986, you're not the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Johnny Cash is dead.
Underrated alternative: Getting Rick Rubin to produce your beard

28/ MAKING MUSIC. AND CLOTHES. AND ENERGY DRINKS

Man, this Young Jeezy single is great! You know what would make it even better? If we could listen to it while drinking some Fergie-brand taurine-infused wine coolers and wearing a Jonas Brothers sweatband! Come on, pop stars of the world, we know no one's buying CDs and you gotta make your Maybach payments somehow, but we wouldn't wear those velour jogging pants with Nelly's name emblazoned on the ass if they came free via BitTorrent.
Underrated alternative: Making music. And music. And music

27/ GETTING BACKSTAGE

What you are expecting: free Jäger, bowls of pills, babes by the couchful, getting to play beer pong with your favorite rock god. What you actually get: free Dasani, a suspect-looking fruit plate and three sorta-babes who take a look at the couchful of shlumpy industry types and split for the after party. Oh, no one told you about that? It's not in a carpeted closet here at the hockey rink; it's at a loft across town, where your favorite rock god is actually playing beer pong. Sorry!
Underrated alternative: Getting White Castle

26/ TIMBALAND

A genius, obviously. A producer gifted beyond all comprehension. In his late-1990s prime, he reinvented the sound of hip-hop radio on a monthly basis, making avant-garde notions of rhythm and noise bounce, pop and swing. But that was 10 years ago. Lately, dude has been coasting—even as his legend (and producing fee) inflates. That Nelly Furtado album? Eh. The Madonna single? We can't actually remember how that one goes. His solo set, *Timbaland Presents Shock Value*? *Bleeeeuuchh*—and it gave the world OneRepublic. The last Justin album stands alone as a recent Timbo triumph, and his upcoming collaboration with Chris Cornell isn't going to change that.
Underrated alternative: Switch

BY JON DOLAN, JOSH EELLS, JOE LEVY, ROB SHEFFIELD, ROB TANNENBAUM, JONAH WEINER AND DOUGLAS WOLK

MOST OVERRATED

25/ LESTER BANGS

A genius, obviously. A rock critic gifted beyond all comprehension. Calling Lou Reed a "pathetic death dwarf"? Awesome! But no one besides Hunter S. Thompson has inspired more caffeine-addled high-school-geek imitators (hey, really doing speed is scary!); just peek beyond his anthologized work and you find the stoned typings of man grinding out rent money or proselytizing like a Mormon. Not convinced? Here's Bangs on Richard Hell & the Voidoids' *Blank Generation*: "The music on this album is some of the strongest, truest rock & roll I have heard in ages. Like most great rock & roll, it stands alone; there are influences, not all of them musical and many of them literary, but he is no arty poseur ... In fact this is also some of the most honest music I have heard in some time." Yawn.
Underrated alternative: Ellen Willis

24/ THE MUSIC BEFORE YOU WERE BORN

Yeah, pops with the salt-and-pepper goatee will insist that you missed the boat, sonny—that back in his day songs were more original, carried more feeling, had more tunefulness than the crap the biz churns out now. But he saw the Doors play 23 times and still has a crush on Joan Baez, so feel free to turn up the new Soulja Boy single and drown him out.
Underrated alternative: The music your little sister loves

23/ THE MUSIC YOU LOVED AS A TEENAGER

That Morrissey quote you scribbled in block letters in everyone's senior yearbook? It was annoying. The sixth-period English paper you wrote about mind-expanding mystical themes in the music of Led Zeppelin? Speak of it to no one. That Counting Crows song on the radio that seemed weirdly poignant the day you and Toby figured out how to make an apple bong after soccer practice? It sucked. The adolescent brain: It can inflate a great band to Christ-size proportions and turn a crappy song into the most meaningful thing on earth. This is one of the reasons we are not allowed to vote until we turn 18. It's in the Constitution.
Underrated alternative: The music you like now

22/ FESTIVALS

OK, here's how it goes: You spend the day in grundle-drenching heat, watching the four acts you want to see and approximately 387 you couldn't care less about. (One of these is Jack Johnson.)

A TYPICAL FESTIVAL: AND THIS IS JUST THE CONCESSION AREA!

The food sucks, the warm beer is overpriced, the lawn is packed and you have to stand in line for an hour to pee inside a giant litter box. And at the end of the night, when you finally find your car, it's being used as a picnic table by three stoned hippies from Eureka who "just need a ride back to the freeway, man." Do yourself a favor, music fans: Just. Stay. Home.
Underrated alternative: YouTube

21/ TEXTING PEOPLE AT A CONCERT TO SAY, "I'M AT A CONCERT!"

20/ BEING INFLUENCED BY *PET SOUNDS*

Pet Sounds? Great record. One of the best records you'll hear all day, if you happen to put it on today. Killer. So. Your album that's kinda influenced by *Pet Sounds*, because it's drifty and slow and there's fancy chords and some lush keyboards and vibes and maybe an overdubbed glee club? Plus squeaky vocals and introspective poetry about how you're so sad and lonesome and nobody understands you? *Ssssuck!*
Underrated alternative: Being influenced by *Wild Honey*, the Beach Boys' soul album

19/ "THE HATERS"

It's one of the corniest bait-and-switches in pop music: globally popular, obscenely rich pop stars trying to inject drama into their careers by imagining themselves the victims of smear campaigns propagated by jealous competitors, backbiting ex-friends and, of course, the media. From Nas's "Hate Me Now" to Rihanna's "Dem Haters" to Lindsay Lohan's "Rumors," the baseless-persecution anthem is a genre unto itself. Well, except in the case of Lindsay. There the hate does seem pretty genuine.
Underrated alternative: Songs about how lucky your ass is to write songs for a living

18/ LISTS

17/ RING TONES

Are they the new paradigm for pop? Only if you like listening to your music in hideously tinny 11-second chunks at random intervals for multiple times what it costs to buy the full song, while annoying everyone unfortunate enough to be within 50 feet of you.
Underrated alternative: Setting your phone on vibrate

16/ GOD

No, he didn't help you make your shitty little hip-hop record.

15/ SATAN

No, he didn't help you make your shitty little metal record.

14/ PINK FLOYD

We'll give them this. *The Dark Side of the Moon* is fully deserving of your love even when the smoke clears. And if you haven't heard *Wish You Were Here* lately, treat yourself to 60 minutes of cloud-surfing guitars. But no rock legend has released fewer good—hell, listenable!—albums. The early stuff? Unbearable LSD slapstick. *The Wall*? Set a new bar for self-important bombast. *The Division Bell*? Come the fuck on. They inspired Radiohead's most overrated music (hey, maybe that should be No. 28!), Phish worship them, and that thing where you try to sync up *Dark Side* and *The Wizard of Oz* only works for people who go to sleep cuddling their bong.

Underrated alternative: Narcotics Anonymous

13/ WOODSTOCK

Watch the movie, play the soundtrack or listen to David Crosby sing about it and it makes you glad for one thing—you weren't there. With all due respect to the acid flashbacks of actual eyewitnesses, it was a miserable, wet weekend interrupted by moments of glory. There weren't enough toilets, food or drinking water. Everything ran hideously late. Many of the bands are deservedly forgotten (Sweetwater? Quill? Sha Na freaking Na?). Joni Mitchell didn't show up, Grateful Dead sucked and Jimi Hendrix's set was a mess. Extra demerits for inspiring the rape-and-fire nightmare that was Woodstock '99. Brace yourself: The 40th anniversary will be coming up next year.
Underrated alternative: Monterey Pop

12/ ENCORES

The band gets to go backstage, towel off, grab a quick bite to eat, do drugs, make an E-trade or two. The crowd gets to stand around with their cell phones in the air, trying to decide if it's better to hear the best Nickelback song or beat the rush to the parking lot.
Underrated alternative: Ending the show when the drummer explodes

11/ CBGB

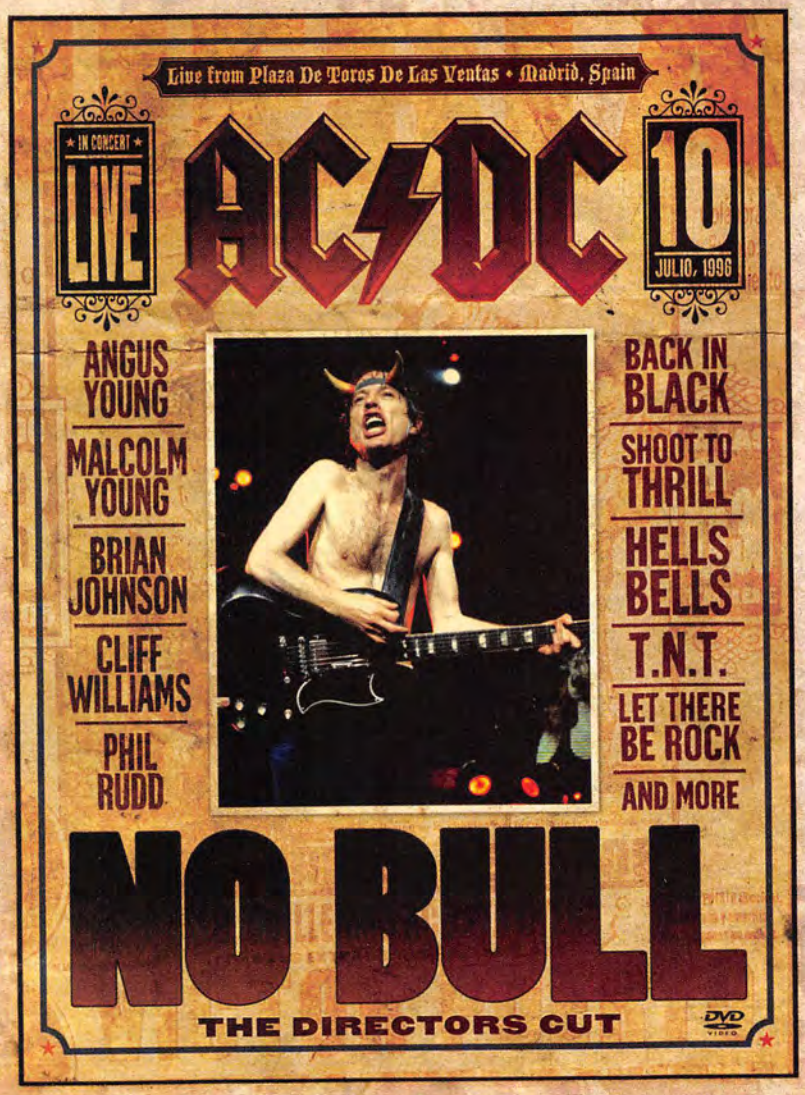
Did you ever piss there? We did, and still can't get the smell off our fingers. Imagine the Cloaca Maxima sewer of ancient Rome if it had been strafed during the Blitz, then tagged by drunken graffiti artists. Yes, CBGB was the petri dish of punk: No CBGB? No Talking Heads, Blondie or Ramones. Only the Bee Gees' mama gave birth to more genius. But after about 1989, the club stopped booking great bands and lived on a stale combination of myth, T-shirt sales and

PREVIOUS SPREAD: JIMI HENDRIX: HENRY DILTZ/CORBIS; RUBEN STUDDARD: ANDREW MACPHERSON/CORBIS OUTLINE; RICK RUBIN: JEFF MINTON/CORBIS OUTLINE; PINK FLOYD: LFI; RAZOR BLADE: DAVID TRONCOSO/JUPITER IMAGES; TUPAC SHAKUR: MICHAEL O'NEILL/CORBIS OUTLINE; GRAMMY: SETH JOEL/CORBIS; THOM YORKE: JO HALE/GETTY IMAGES; TIMBALAND: RD/LEON/RETNA; KISS: ANDRE CSILLAG/REX FEATURES. THIS PAGE: WOODSTOCK: DENNIS VAN TINE/LFI.

NO COMPROMISE. NO SUBSTITUTE. NO EQUAL.

NO BULL

THE DIRECTOR'S CUT



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MOST OVERRATED

Japanese tourists. When it finally shuttered, in 2006, people pretended it hadn't been dying in slow motion for decades.
Underrated alternative: Buy a Talking Heads box set. It won't make your fingers reek.

CAUTION: LOOKING AT THIS PHOTO MAY GIVE YOU GONORRHEA.

10 / BLING

Diamonds have inspired some of our favorite hip-hop lines. Paul Wall: "The disco ball in my mouth insinuates I'm balling"; Pharrell: "So short, so icy, like that penguin Chilly Willy"; Ludacris: "My diamonds are reckless, feels like a midget is hanging from my necklace." And, sure, there is something magnificently absurd about Rick Ross's diamond replica of his own head. But enough already. They're glorified sparkly nuggets of carbon, they've brought about untold human-rights atrocities in African mines and their scarcity is a total fabrication anyhow.
Underrated alternative: Let's bring back the dookie rope

WALL: "MORE JUICE, PLEASE!"

9 / THE CLUB

Eh. It's noisy, it's crowded, the drinks are $16 apiece (and pink), the dudes are wearing shiny shirts, the girls are spray-tanned and the DJ keeps playing songs about how awesome the club is.
Underrated alternative: The parking lot, where the drinks are cheaper and the girls are more desperate

8 / WINNING *AMERICAN IDOL*

So, to recap—Taylor Hicks: dropped. Ruben Studdard: dropped. Jordin Sparks: Wait, did she even win? With the exception of country star Carrie Underwood and O.G. champ Kelly Clarkson, not a single *Idol* winner has built a sustainable career. Meanwhile, Chris Daughtry and Jennifer Hudson—who didn't even finish in the Top 3!—are selling quadruple platinum and winning Oscars, respectively. Don't get us wrong, winning is fun. You get to sing a song about how special your "now" is. But take a tip from Leona Lewis and try *The X Factor* instead.
Underrated alternative: Winning *MILF Island*

CONGRATS! NEXT STOP, DINNER THEATER!

7 / THE GRAMMYS

Unless Kanye blows a gasket or O.D.B. hops onstage during someone else's acceptance speech to remind us that Wu-Tang "is for the children," sitting through a Grammys is like watching paint dry on Celine Dion's forehead. Last year's Album of the Year award went to jazz old-timer Herbie Hancock's CD of Joni Mitchell covers, 2004's Best New Artist was Maroon 5, the first hip-hop Grammy didn't come around until 1989 and on and on. Tune in to the show itself and you've still got to sit through seven opera-bluegrass-Tejano medleys just to watch Green Day play. And what's with that bald guy who comes out every year to tell us we're all going straight to hell unless we stop downloading?
Underrated alternative: First National Bank of Buffalo Salesman of the Year Awards Dinner

KANYE: THE ONLY GOOD THING AT THE GRAMMYS

6 / COCAINE

No way—you used to deal coke? And it's a scary business? Dude! You should totally make a hip-hop record about that before somebody else thinks of the idea first. Blame it on the booger sugar: Cocaine keeps inspiring more crappy music than any other drug. Whether it's pitiful old rock stars burning blow-holes in their brains, young bands snorting themselves into the delusion they should get heavy on their second album ("Hey, *sniiiff*, how about a concept album? About America? But with bagpipes! *Snerrrff!*") or just cliché-slanging trap rappers still getting high on Biggie's supply, just say no.
Underrated alternative: Amyl nitrate

5 / WRITING YOUR OWN SONGS ...

Mandy Moore does, Britney Spears doesn't.

4 / ... SINGING WELL ...

Joss Stone does, T-Pain doesn't.

3 / ... AND MEANING WHAT YOU SAY

Boring Beck does, Awesome Beck doesn't.

2 / YOUR FAVORITE BLOGGER'S NEW FAVORITE BAND

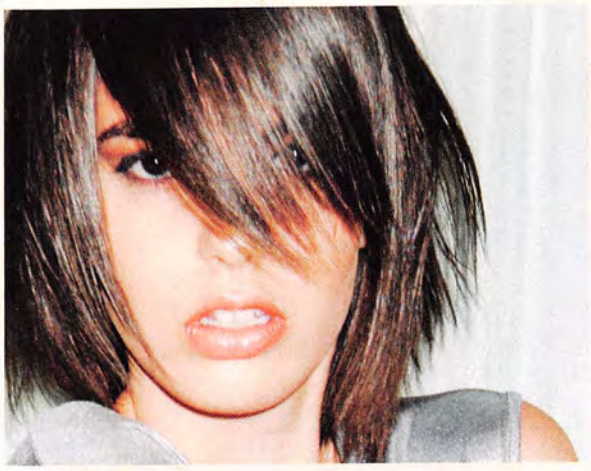
Thanks to the Web 2.0 bubble, it's now possible for a next-big-thing band to go through the Hootie and the Blowfish career arc in four hours. Yay, Web 2.0! The problem is, the *OMG! Best Band Ever!* zombie rhythm of blogging doesn't work for music, where it really does help if you play the song a second time. The hype-backlash cycle has gotten to where the next Black Rainbow Wolf Hunter go from novelty to has-been by the time they're recording their second song. Meanwhile, hard drives are still stuffed with microhouse remixes that will never be listened to on real speakers. Sad.
Underrated alternative: Your favorite blogger's *last* favorite band

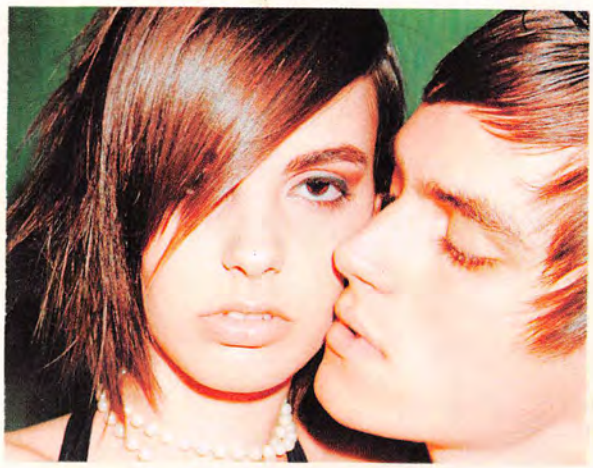
1 / 2PAC

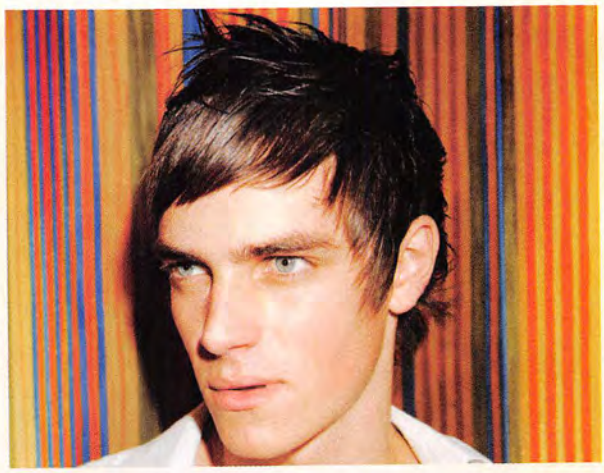
He had insane rock-star charisma. He admirably conceived of a gangsta rapper as a principled rebel. His booming baritone gave basslines competition for the most-trunk-rattling part of a hip-hop song. Hell, even *Juice* hasn't aged nearly as badly as you'd expect. But while Tupac's musical highs were epic—the pro-feminist "Keep Ya Head Up," the terrifying "Hail Mary," the boisterous "California Love"—that still leaves 15,837 other songs. He was a good rapper, not a great one: The guy larded records with self-mythologizing, mediocre filler that wouldn't have made Biggie's "give to Lil' Cease" file. Maybe someone in his retinue could've stepped in during one of those legendary 96-hour recording binges and said, "Pac, instead of laying down this 14-minute rant about how Sun Tzu taught you how to take down the East Coast, how about some Yahtzee?" The man: awesome. The music: somewhat less than awesome.
Underrated alternative: **Pac's namesake, Tupac Amaru II, the 18th-century Incan rebel**

2PAC SHOWS OFF HIS 6PAC.

CBGB: JIM COOPER/AP PHOTO; KANYE WEST: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; TUPAC SHAKUR: DANNY CLINCH/CORBIS OUTLINE; TAYLOR HICKS: LESTER COHEN/WIREIMAGE; PAUL WALL: ARNOLD TURNER /WIREIMAGE.







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THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM
WE REVIEW 'EM

Worst. Poker night. Ever.

MAD TV

THE HIPPEST BAND IN ROCK SEES THE WORLD COLLAPSING, RESPONDS WITH BRIGHT HOOKS AND WALL-SMASHING SEX BY JOSH EELLS

TV ON THE RADIO DEAR SCIENCE, ★★★★ INTERSCOPE

If you knew Armageddon was really at hand, what would you do? Take to the streets and war against the wicked forces that brought Eden to a point of ruin? Lock the doors, dim the lights and weep for the wayward soul of man? Or would you throw one last kick-ass party, knowing you won't live long enough to feel the hangover?

A few years ago, TV on the Radio were worried and glum; now they're worried and ecstatic. Singers Kyp Malone and Tunde Adebimpe and sonic whiz Dave Sitek began recording songs in the fall of 2001, partly as a response to the attacks of September 11. Visual artists by trade, they emanated boho cool from the start, palling around with David Bowie and Yeah Yeah Yeahs and inhabiting an air of stylish anomie. Their 2004 debut, *Desperate Youth, Blood Thirsty Babes*, was an artfully crafted mess—abrasive and prickly, just the thing for a city at perpetual unease. The 2006 follow-up, *Return to Cookie Mountain*, was even darker. Cryptic and dense, with songs about doomed relationships and eerie urban wastelands, it was hailed as the definitive statement of post-9/11 New York. The album possessed a kind of terrifying beauty; it was also almost totally joyless.

Two years later, doom fatigue has set in. The curiously punctuated *Dear Science*, (note the comma) sounds like a weight being lifted: The world may be going down in flames, but that's all the more reason to live it up. "Crying" is a bubbly disco jam about race riots and tanks in the streets, and "Red Dress" deploys a spring-loaded new-wave riff to herald the coming of the Antichrist. "DLZ," with its scorched-earth guitars and Richter-

JENNY LEWIS
☺ Her band, Rilo Kiley, has bloomed from obscurity to opening for Coldplay. On her second solo album, Lewis purrs, "I'm a bad, bad girl."
★★★★

LITTLE RICHARD
☺ That pompadoured fellow from the Geico commercial? Not a great actor. But he could make a piano sound like a siren, and he helped invent rock & roll.
★★★★★

THE NIGHTWATCHMAN
☹ On paper, it sounds pretty awful: Rage Against the Machine minus the rhythm section, the rapping and the riffs. On record, it sounds even worse!
★★½

TV ON THE RADIO: MICHEAL LAVINE; LEWIS: BRYAN BEDDER/GETTY IMAGES; LITTLE RICHARD: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; NIGHT WATCHMAN: SEAN RICIGLIANO.

SCORE
CLASSIC 5★
GREAT 4★
GOOD 3★
MEDIOCRE 2★
FOUL 1★

destroying drums, feels like the End of Days; yet when Malone howls, "This is beginning to feel like the dawn of the *luz* of forever" (translation: We're all fucked), you can almost hear his eyes light up. Artists from Prince to R.E.M. to Busta Rhymes have embraced the apocalypse as an excuse to party; TV on the Radio get a revelation from Revelation.

The band made waves in 2005 with their anti-Bush screed "Dry Drunk Emperor," but they aren't the types to shout slogans. TVOTR is a political band the way tomatoes are a fruit—vaguely, obliquely, head-scratchingly. When Pitchfork named *Cookie Mountain* the second-best album of 2006, the reviewer admitted, "I still don't really know what the songs are actually about," and *Dear Science*, is equally enigmatic. "Red Dress" scorns warmongers and smug antiwar hipsters alike, and the delicately pretty "Stork & Owl" is a parable with no clear moral. Best of all is "Family Tree," a tender, string-laden love song, easily the most beautiful thing they've ever done. It could almost be Coldplay, if it weren't for the lyrics about blood dripping from a gallows.

It helps that the band is relying less on what art schoolers call *texture* and more on actual songs. TVOTR won the hearts of record-store clerks everywhere by constructing fortresses of noise, impressive but impenetrable. They've toned down the distorted-guitar squall and ash gray skronk that blanketed their first two albums; the rhythms are friskier, more vigorous; the hooks accessible and easier to love. If this album were a T-shirt, it would say, FUCK ART, LET'S DANCE. "Shout Me Out" even cribs a snippet of melody from Tom Petty. "There's a golden age comin' round!" Malone shouts on the first single, "Golden Age," a thermonuclear sunrise. Nothing like Judgment Day to make a man feel funky.

Not to mention horny. The album closes with the triumphant army march of "Lover's Day," where Malone launches a troop surge in his pants. "Ball so hard we'll smash the walls!" he moans. "Break the bed and crash the floors!" TVOTR have done sexy before—check the erotically predatory "Wolf Like Me"—but never this desperately. Listen closely, though, and a different kind of hunger emerges. "Tear apart/The apart/We seem to think we are," Malone pleads, his vulcanized-rubber voice starting to crack. This isn't a story of lust—it's a story of reconciliation. When the bombs are done falling and the gashes in the landscape start to scar, this divisive, often difficult band wants to help put things back together.

DOWNLOAD "Crying," "DLZ," "Family Tree"

Tales From the Studio

Tunde Adebimpe of TVOTR says pulled pork, love and weed were essential to the making of *Dear Science*,

Adebimpe performs the world's most avant-garde version of "Jingle Bell Rock."

Where did the magic happen?
Staygold Studios in Brooklyn. It looks like an interior room on the Death Star.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how difficult was it to record?
I'd give it a five as far as difficulty and six as far as fun, because the record itself goes to 11 in terms of awesomeness. You have to go through difficulty to get to the awesome.

The money spent recording this album could buy ...
A 1986 Chevy Impala with vinyl interior.

Studio demands include?
Red Bull shows up. Espresso. Lots of caffeine and heroic amounts of marijuana. Not everyone partakes. String players don't smoke weed. Way to live on the edge, string players.

Most frequently ordered takeout dish?
Kyp and I are fans of fish sandwiches. Dave usually orders a steak frites. Jaleel enjoys a pulled-pork sandwich, and Gerard will eat anything in a three-mile radius. I've seen him fold a pizza in half and eat it. And he's a thin man!

Why should someone buy your album?
Because it was made with love. And the packaging smells nice—it's that new-book smell. And the music is not boring, which is reason enough to listen to a little of it. We should put a sticker on the front that says: NOT BORING.

The haters will say ...
That they don't like it? I don't speak hater. Maybe we'll have a section on the Web site: What do you hate about this record? "I hate that you guys aren't women."

The album is a cross between ___ and ___?
Art and commerce, hopefully!

Album you unabashedly ripped off?
For "Dancing Choose," I prayed to the gods of Slick Rick and Devo. I asked them to sit me down and teach me something. They heard my prayers, and like the rest of the gods, they ignored them.

LIZZY GOODMAN

We have good news and bad news ...

Blitzen Trapper: "Hey, dudes, have we trapped any Blitzen lately?"

BLITZEN TRAPPER
FURR
★★★½
SUB POP

Urban cowboys from Portland, Oregon, have a way with prairie poetry

Whenever there's a Western on TMC, you can bet the men of Blitzen Trapper are on the couch, ideally very stoned. Their ramble-tamble roots rock evokes the transitory things hard men with worried minds do between gunfights—High Plains drifting, shaving with tree bark, wondering if that night in El Paso with the one-eyed whore was such a hot idea, etc. On this fourth record, singer-guitarist Eric Earley accesses the haunted Americana Wilco nailed on *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, with big nods to mid-'60s Bob Dylan, early-'70s Neil Young and the country Grateful Dead. Earley sings like a parched prospector as he waits out the apocalypse on "Fire & Fast Bullets" and plays a philosophizing outlaw on "Black River Killer." Elsewhere, he describes himself as a "moonwalkin' cowboy dusty riding." Probably not how Clint Eastwood would say it, but memorable nonetheless.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD "Sleepytime in the Western World," "Fire & Fast Bullets"

BRIGHTBLACK MORNING LIGHT
MOTION TO REJOIN
★★★½
MATADOR

Slow-grooving New Mexico hippie duo takes another lovely stroll to the head shop

Bad news for readers in Florida, Kansas and other places with killjoy state legislatures: It may be illegal for you to buy a Brightblack CD, because their music almost certainly counts as drug paraphernalia. As with their first two LPs, the pleasure on

READ THOUSANDS OF REVIEWS AND MORE AT BLENDER.COM.

BLITZEN TRAPPER: JADE HARRIS; ADEBIMPE: BRYAN BEDDER/GETTY IMAGES.

album three is gorgeously narcotic. Skinny-dipped in reverb, Rachael Hughes and Nathan Shineywater sing-sigh over a psychedelic version of '70s soul, full of gently loping electric keyboards and cloudy horn charts. The band is part of the over-bearded, under-bathed freak-folk scene, and their lyrics, unabashedly flower-powery, concern the wisdom of teepees and the lameness of oppression. Yes, it's a bit goofy, but what saves them from insufferable quasi-mysticism is the luminous fogbank of sound that swallows the words whole, reducing them to just another layer of haze. The result is severely mellow, but too sensuous—the basslines thick with libidinal tug, the vocals steeped in contented, coital afterglow—to ever get boring. Even if you hate the smell of incense, this is killer make-out music.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD "Hologram Buffalo," "Past a Weatherbeaten Fencepost"

Gym Class Heroes take a breather between four-square and rope climb.

GYM CLASS HEROES: GARY VENTURA.

BUCKCHERRY
BLACK BUTTERFLY

★★½

ELEVEN SEVEN/ATLANTIC

Bigger than ever, sleaze rockers fall back on the bad habits they're so proud of

After a no-sell sophomore slump and a lineup overhaul, these tattooed L.A. love boys returned from nowhere to move more than a million copies of their third album, *15*. Landing the apologetic power ballad "Sorry" onto pop radio and the unapologetic bump-and-grind "Crazy Bitch" into strip clubs turned their career around. Now they fluctuate between those two poles while their by-the-book hard rock continues to split the difference between Black Crowes and Guns N' Roses—though no longer with the wit that fueled their coke-y 1999 breakout, "Lit Up." Two change-ups stand out: the fuming teen-tantrum hoedown "A Child Called 'It'" and the supercharged metal raver "Fallout." The rest neatly divides into unconvincing sap aimed at girls who'd love to save a bad boy and substance-abuse celebrations too self-satisfied to bother making riffs stick.

CHUCK EDDY

DOWNLOAD "A Child Called 'It'"

CALEXICO
CARRIED TO DUST

★★½

TOUCH AND GO/QUARTERSTICK

The best Western epic since *No Country for Old Men*

Few bands convey a sense of place as deeply as Calexico—but they never stay in one spot very long. Named after a border town, this Arizona six-piece makes music about drifting from crumbling dance halls to off-the-grid cantinas, all richly evoked by Ennio Morricone guitars, mariachi horns and pedal steel. There's a loose story line to their sixth album, something about an L.A. writer who hits the highway and passes through desert towns, swap meets and places where you better *habla Español*—imagine Belle and Sebastian dropped into the landscape of *No Country for Old Men*. In the end, though, Calexico's words, sometimes overcooked, are the least of it. From the way gently twanging guitar builds to toxic fuzz on "Man Made Lake" to the whistling in "El Gatillo" that nails the stranger-in-town vibe, the band's best stories are in their music.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD "House of Valparaiso," "Man Made Lake"

COLD WAR KIDS
LOYALTY TO LOYALTY

★★★

DOWNTOWN

Closet-Christian quartet from Long Beach, California, are ready to be committed

Nathan Willett is insane. Or so he insists in his frazzled, nasal wail on "Something Is Not Right With Me," a highlight of Cold War Kids' second album. Willett keeps proclaiming himself imbalanced, though his behavior won't exactly get him committed to Bellevue (he picks a bad song on a bar jukebox, *totally* ruining the vibe). Throughout the album, haunted-saloon piano and reverb-choked guitar conjure a murky, wobbly misaligned version of old R&B while Willett declares, "I'm like Sisyphus in the sun." It's a wordy and show-offy essay on frayed nerves, but what keeps the plot from thinning is the more fantastical side of Willett's unhinged ego. In the noirish fog of "Golden Gate Jumpers," he eyes "a black skirt on the rail" and saves the dame from jumping with a few smooth words. The melodrama is only in his head, which is the real sign something's not right—he doesn't have to shout it.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD "Something Is Not Right With Me," "Mexican Dogs"

ASTONISHING FACT! **Cold War Kids'** Nathan Willett used to valet park at the fancy Chateau Marmont in Hollywood, where he once scratched Kirsten Dunst's car during a Christmas party.

DAN LE SAC VS. SCROOBIUS PIP
ANGLES

★½

STRANGE FAMOUS

Brit MC gets high on the sound of himself talking. That makes one of us

For all the musical commandments U.K. rapper Pip dropped on 2007's loghorreic break-beat jam "Thou Shalt Always Kill" (e.g., "Thou shalt not make repetitive generic music"), he has ignored a few essential ones on his full-length: Thou shalt not try to rhyme the periodic table, nor fake profundity with verbosity ("their lyrical prognosis is like spiritual osmosis"); thou shalt not rap a letter from God to Man unless thou hast a better intro than "Hey, there, how's it going? Long time no see;" thou shalt not tweak Game Boy fizzies and laptop beats so loud it sounds like you're actually battling your DJ; thou shalt not pen antisuicide songs that sound like new-age meditation tapes featuring high school guidance counselors; thou shalt not close with a trite 11-minute hood version of *A Christmas Carol*. Come to think of it, thou shalt not have a name like a pot-smoking Dickens character, either.

ALEX BENENSON

DOWNLOAD "Thou Shalt Always Kill"

DUNGEN
4

★★★

KEMADO

Swedish acid-casualty-in-the-making serves up another batch of psychedelic stew

Gustav Ejstes grew up milking cows in a tiny Swedish village: appropriately romantic origins for this would-be prophet. As Dungen, he's an electrified throwback to mystical, bygone days—the late '60s—when any songwriter worth his weed took barefoot pilgrimages to the Isle of Skye, befriended woodland creatures and heard the murmurings of Ganesh in overdriven guitars. At its best, the echo-chamber soup of flute trills, infinitely cascading drums and fuzz-ball stoner riffs does seep into your head and expand the contents. But the jams often drift when Ejstes wants them to glide; his singing, all in Swedish, is a touch whiny; and his ear for melody can be painfully flat. Ejstes's first musical love was not Jimi Hendrix but N.W.A, whose raps he once emulated in awkward Swenglish—he's a scavenger and a pastiche man, and he's much better at nailing a sound than writing a song.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD "Mina Damer Och Fasaner," "Samtidigt 1"

GYM CLASS HEROES
THE QUILT

★★★

DECAYDANCE/FUELED BY RAMEN

Rap-rock holdouts sully polished, upbeat music with bitter narcissism

Meet upwardly mobile Travis McCoy: "My original plan was to live as a starving artist," he raps in "Home." "But starving artists die hungry, dress bummy." And how far his crew has come. Aided by coproducer and Fall Out Boy savant Patrick Stump, who is the closest thing emo has to a soul singer, Gym Class Heroes can approximate the ecstatic pop of the Jackson 5 as naturally as if they were dancing to "ABC," and they skillfully pilfer reggae and pop punk, too. McCoy keeps his eyes fixed on the mirror, and while he's fond of what he sees—a mischief-maker who gleaned +

values from his paper route, and whose only true weakness is compulsively scamming on women—he's defensive, spitting venom at targets as large and shapeless as blogs and "haters." His delivery is laudably cool for a Warped Tour MC. But it's gunk on the gears of this dancing machine.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD "Cookie Jar," "Drnk Txt Rmeo"

KASAI ALLSTARS

IN THE 7TH MOON, THE CHIEF TURNED INTO A SWIMMING FISH AND ATE THE HEAD OF HIS ENEMY BY MAGIC

★★★★

CRAMMED DISCS

Acoustic-electric trance mongers from West Africa give "jam band" new meaning

Twenty-odd musicians from five bands, jamming in this third volume of the mind-bending ethno-trance series Congotronics and counting moons in the longest, nuttiest album title since Fiona Apple's *When the Pawn* ... At first glance, this tradition-jumbling Congolese group seems all about the numbers. There's a geometric elegance to the opening track, "Quick as White," as one sound after another—acoustic instruments that buzz and quack, electric guitars, the percolating *likembe* (a resonant and always chipper-sounding little thumb piano)—joins a gloriously complex picture. But in a style gentler and more richly textured than the crudely amplified minimalism of the series' debut by Konono N°1, the songs swell in and out of expansive and hypnotic patterns, forming clouds of interwoven rhythms.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD "Quick as White," "Kafuulu Balu," "Mbua-A-Maturnba"

ASTONISHING FACT! Former tattoo artist Travis McCoy of **Gym Class Heroes** is so obsessed with the pop duo Hall and Oates that he got Daryl Hall inked on his right hand and John Oates on his left.

KINGS OF LEON

ONLY BY THE NIGHT

★★★½

RCA

Nashville clan, raised by a Pentecostal preacher, contemplate sin and decide it's pretty fun

After the party, there's the after party. And after the after party, there's the hotel party. And after that? Maybe a juice cleanse. Five years since their skirt-chasing, punked-up Lynyrd Skynyrd boogie turned these four Tennessee kinfolk into backwoods playboys, the Followill boys have grown reflective. Singer-guitarist Caleb still growls like he eats mud flaps for breakfast, but his Jack-and-Coke slur has softened into a craggy, contemplative moan (he wrote these songs in a painkiller glaze after injuring his shoulder, supposedly in a fight with drumming brother Nathan). As the song title "Sex on Fire" hints, "contemplative" is relative and includes doing mournful songs about backstage tail. But when Caleb evokes God's wrath on the "crucified U.S.A." or describes lost-highway loneliness, the batter-fried U2 atmospherics and portentous Dixiefied grunge makes his worry as real as Brimstone.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD "Crawl," "Cold Desert"

LATE OF THE PIER

ECHOCLISTEL LAMBIETROY

★★★★

ASTRALWERKS

Don't let the nerdy EverQuest title throw you off: These are sexy, get-high-all-night-in-a-crowded-club jams

"Didn't sleep last night/ Couldn't calm down," singer Sam Eastgate croons while a synth vamps like a bleary digital alarm clock on the first verse of "Broken." Fifty seconds into the track and this British four-piece has already burned through three manic riffs most synth-rock bands couldn't muster in a whole album; no wonder these dudes can't sleep. Oozing ambiguous sexual energy and falsetto glam-rock hysterics, hopped up on a mess of '80s uppers from Gary Numan's synth grooves ("Bathroom Gurgle") to Talking Heads' chops ("The Enemy Are the Future"), LOTP have made one of the most vital EPs of the year, with a full CD to come in January. They're not just churning out electro-scuzz-soaked romps, they're reclaiming music's right to drop the verse-chorus-verse form, set out on weird five-minute electronic benders and end up somewhere strange and exciting.

ALEX BENENSON

DOWNLOAD "Broken" (Fairylights remix), "The Enemy Are the Future" (Sam's Dance Edit), "Bathroom Gurgle"

I LOVE THIS CD!

ONCE
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK
COLUMBIA

"I come from Irish stock originally, and every time I listen to the soundtrack it makes me feel like I'm back in Ireland. It's really beautiful."
—Steve Coogan

Someone mixed his whites with his Dijons.

RAPHAEL SAADIQ THE WAY I SEE IT ★★★★ COLUMBIA

Preeminent R&B artist of the '90s slays his competition by laying on the subtlety

Soul revivalists play up the emotive—gospel-loving workouts that mesh comfortably with the melismatic overkill of pop singing in the karaoke age. Raphael Saadiq has something else in mind—a fillerless Motown album. Only on the doowop-con-Español "Callin" and the sweetly woozy "Oh Girl" does he stray from the bright, swift, clearly hooked aesthetic of Holland-Dozier-Holland producing the Temptations circa 1965. And with the aesthetic comes the attitude. Saadiq is a romantic who stays true to the deliberate simplicity of such titles as "Sure Hope You Mean It" and "Just One Kiss." But his adaptable baritone is always crisp and cocky—he never threatens to assume the fetal position if he doesn't get the extreme cuddling he craves. And just to show he's a modern guy, he'll proposition you straight up once he lures you into taking that walk outside.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD "Sure Hope You Mean It," "Let's Take a Walk," "100 Yard Dash"

SAADIQ: NORMAN SEEFF; COOGAN: FRANK MICELOTTA/GETTY IMAGES.

JENNY LEWIS

ACID TONGUE

★★★★

WARNER BROS.

Rilo Kiley's old-soul frontwoman looks for love in all the wrong places

Jenny Lewis wants so badly to be bad. After the gospelly *Rabbit Fur Coat*, an upward-looking first solo album full of bittersweet cooing about disbelief and the redemptive power of devotion, her follow-up focuses on earthly pleasures. Lively and loose, cut with collaborators including her talented Scottish boyfriend Johnathan Rice, spooky folkie

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Conor Oberst
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Wale
The Mixtape About Nothing
ALLIDO/INTERSCOPE
This *Seinfeld*-obsessed D.C. MC themes an entire mix tape around the sitcom. Kramer, we see you!

M. Ward and actress-singer Zooey Deschanel, the 11 songs (many of which she has performed live for years) encompass Southern-gothic folk, Appalachian blues stomps and "The Next Messiah," an eight-minute, Who-style rock mini-opera. Lewis plays the temptress, singing about predatory women ("Carpetbaggers," a duet with Elvis Costello) and teasing, "It's a bad man's world and I'm a bad, bad girl," in a voice as clear and hot as melting glass. But behind the evil-woman refrains lies a sucker for love, cautiously hopeful and hopelessly sweet. Lewis has seen too much to believe in fairy-tale endings—but that doesn't mean she's going to stop reading.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD "Pretty Bird," "See Fernando"

TOM MORELLO: THE NIGHTWATCHMAN
THE FABLED CITY
★★½
EPIC

A flame-throwing guitarist's humdrum polemic; maybe he should have called himself the Hall Monitor

In this summer of self-serious superheroes, Tom Morello wants to make room for one more. Thus the return of The Nightwatchman: by day, the mild-mannered guitar assassin for Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave; by night, an earnest protest singer fighting for truth, justice and chord changes we can believe in. On this slightly more spirited second album, Morello—who majored in poli-sci at Harvard (and minored in *wa-wa wakka wa-wa*)—has admirable intentions, calling out greedy plutocrats and heartless politicians in a burly baritone that drips gravitas. But in his hands, an acoustic guitar is like Kryptonite: The protest ballads plod, and even the song about praying for God to drown the president sounds more weary than pissed. The Nightwatchman is that rare crusader whose secret identity is more exciting than his alter ego.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD "Saint Isabelle"

> Jomo Kenyatta, the great-uncle of **Tom Morello**, was an African revolutionary who fought for independence and became the first prime minister and president of Kenya.
>
> ASTONISHING FACT!

OKKERVIL RIVER
THE STAND INS
★★★★
JAGJAGUWAR

From a Texas smarty-pants, hard-luck anthems for *n+1* subscribers

For Will Sheff, there's nothing more heroic than failure. The leader of Okkervil River, Sheff sifts through the emotional wreckage of collapses and tragedies like a prospector panning for gold—there's beauty in that mess somewhere. Okkervil's fifth disc is a companion to last year's excellent *The Stage Names*, and its subjects, as the title implies, are people on fame's fringes: suicidal porn stars, frustrated poets, self-loathing groupies. Lyrically, Sheff straddles the line between precious and brilliant, warbling twisty, appositive-packed tales about life on the road ("Lost Coastlines") and crumbled relationships ("Calling and Not Calling My Ex") over cranked-up, vaguely folkish rock riffs. And, in typically self-deprecating fashion, his least sympathetic characters—the manipulative rock star in "Pop Lie," the entitled artiste he lops off at the knees in the cheerfully acidic "Singer Songwriter"—might be Sheff himself.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD "Lost Coastlines," "Singer Songwriter," "Calling and Not Calling My Ex"

PLAIN WHITE T'S
BIG BAD WORLD
★★★
HOLLYWOOD

Chicago quintet is the rare act to be nominated for a Grammy *and* a Teen Choice Award

Plain White T's have trafficked in angsty pop-punk songs about crappy girlfriends before "Hey There Delilah," their vulnerable relationship ballad, topped the singles chart a year ago. So how has success changed frontman Tom Higgenson? As his fourth album's bouncy title track suggests, it has turned him happy-go-lucky. "It's a big bad world," he declares, "but we get back up/Shake off all the dust." Where past albums documented a litany of bummers, cascading melodies now airbrush moments of depression or kinkiness—even the horny groupie of "Natural Disaster" sounds like a girl you could take home to Mom. Higgenson's new outlook is surprising: The band's second-biggest song is called "Hate (I Really Don't Like You)." But when he wrings considerable juice from one of songwriting's sappiest sentiments—California as the cure to life's problems ("Meet Me in California")—it's clear he aims to enjoy the mood as long as it lasts.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD "Meet Me in California," "Big Bad World"

SLIPKNOT
ALL HOPE IS GONE
★★★
ROADRUNNER

Nine-strong Des Moines, Iowa, band, whose fans call themselves "maggots," learn how to hate others, too

Slipknot's declarations of self-hatred have been brutal and relentless, but after almost 10 years of repetition, even a masked band can grow bored. So now, in place of hating themselves, they hate you. For their fourth album, Slipknot debut not only new versions of their twisted face masks, but also some new notions for their familiar theme of decadence: War is hell ("This Cold Black"), relationships can hurt ("Dead Memories"), U.S. politics are evil ("Gematria [The Killing Name]") and so on. Dark balladry ("Snuff") and textured melodies paw at the shredded guitar drives, pompous electro squeals and frontman Corey Taylor's dirty-razor attitude. Finding new targets for their thrashing contempt, Slipknot make ugliness sound just a little bit pretty.

DARREN RATNER

DOWNLOAD "Gematria (The Killing Name)," "Snuff"

THE ACADEMY IS ...
FAST TIMES AT BARRINGTON HIGH
★★★
DECAYDANCE/FUELED BY RAMEN

Nerdy Fall Out Boy BFFs shock the whole school by winning prom-king vote

Millennial emo began as a rallying cry for the oversensitive and undermuscled—songs performed by and about guys unable to get girls. Recently, though, success has changed emo's M.O.: It's hard to mope when Pete Wentz, your scene's de facto leader, just married a Simpson sister. The Academy Is ... hail from the same Chicago suburbs as Wentz, record for his label, and their singer, the impossibly-cheekboned William Beckett, apes Wentz's front-running tendencies on this band's third album. Collaborating with producers-hitmakers S*A*M and Sluggo (Gym Class Heroes, Blake Lewis), Beckett sounds like the most popular kid in his class, wedding memories of high school triumphs (kisses in the darkroom, post-class canoodling) with glistening, world-beating guitar-pop choruses. "Summer Hair = Forever Young" and the especially exultant "His Girl Friday" are made for winners, not whiners. Beware of jocks in the mosh pit.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD "His Girl Friday," "Beware! Cougar!"

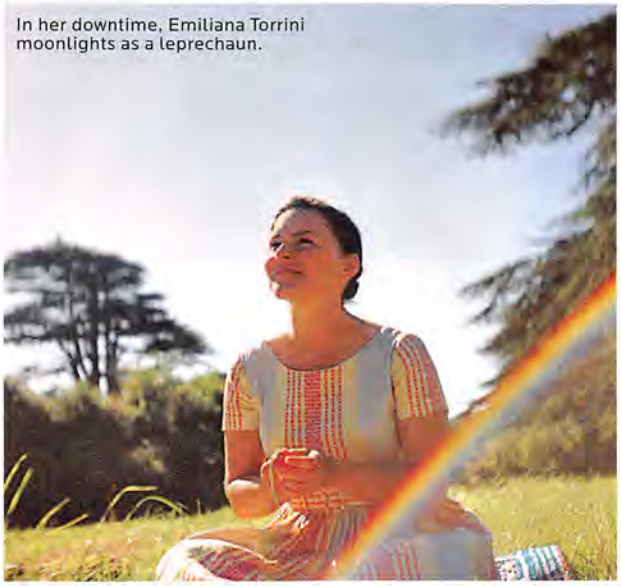
I LOVE THIS CD!

THE CLASH
LONDON CALLING
CBS

"It's gotta be one of the top five rock albums of all time. It's smart and funny. It kicks ass. And there's not a bad song on it."
—Rainn Wilson

WILSON: GENE BLEVINS/CORBIS.

Maybe Slipknot weren't the best choice for Kayley's 9th birthday party.



In her downtime, Emiliana Torrini moonlights as a leprechaun.

TINDERSTICKS
THE HUNGRY SAW
★★★★
CONSTELLATION
The best Tindersticks album since 1997 occurs entirely at night and mixes literary pretensions with an alcoholic aura

Talk about a drinking problem—how are nattily attired absinthe sippers around the world supposed to wait five years between Tindersticks albums? Fortunately, the British balladeers have returned after a long layoff as elegantly miserable as ever. Stuart A. Staples reconvened bandmates in a French country house to cut these orchestrated torch songs full of strings, horns and top-shelf liquor. Staples still sings in the wounded murmur of Bryan Ferry on the downside of a Fashion Week bender. In the showstopper "Mother Dear," his voice captures the moment when he realizes the bar is closing, the Brazilian girl is gone with his wallet and the rental place will definitely charge him for those stains on his tux. The strangest highlight is the upbeat instrumental "The Organist Entertains"—maybe because the organist is the only character on the album having any fun.
ROB SHEFFIELD
DOWNLOAD "Mother Dear," "Boobar, Come Back to Me," "Come Feel the Sun"

EMILIANA TORRINI
ME AND ARMINI
★★★½
ROUGH TRADE
Diminutive singer, last name Davíðsdóttir, sang "Gollum's Song" in *The Lord of the Rings*

She's Icelandic. She has a clear, childlike tone. She thinks about life, love and death. And she's not Björk. Actually, Emiliana Torrini (she's half-Italian) is closer to Feist: approachable but never shallow, the kind of songwriter who lilts a confession like, "Some people think that I'm heading for a meltdown." Torrini is comfortable with sparse guitars or loopy electronics, and she comes up with disarming melodies and nonsense-syllable choruses. Her third album is her third incarnation, after the dense trip-hop of her 1999 debut and the folky melancholy of *Fisherman's Woman* in 2005. Now she riffles through styles: gentle guitar picking, reggae vamps, time-warped '60s pop, cheerfully disorienting synthesizers and one eruptive rocker about murder, "Gun." Torrini captures a few joyful infatuations followed by a lot of lingering wounds; she's vulnerable but never conquered.
JON PARELES
DOWNLOAD "Ha Ha," "Heard It All Before"

WILLOUGHBY
I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE UP TO
★★★
SARGENT
Los Angeles singer-songwriter channels a happier Elliott Smith

Gus Seyffert is a six-foot-four L.A. singer-songwriter who has worked out a sleek, retro-fitted style you could call spy rock. Recording under the alias Willoughby, he performs songs steeped in the sort of secrets shared over the pillow. This is candlelit music, low-key and laced with tremolo, delivered with a conversational intimacy. For a few years now, Los Angeles has been awash with bands influenced by Elliott Smith, and the late legend is a key factor here: the Beatles obsession, the deftly picked acoustic guitar, the guy half-whispering in your ear, all adding up to a soundtrack for a night of droll double-dealing.
RJ SMITH
DOWNLOAD "Frankenstein," "Dust Bunnies"

WIRE
OBJECT 47
★★★★
PINK FLAG
Grizzled British chameleons strip down and dance

The best-aging band of punk rock's Class of '77, Wire have radically transformed their sound with almost every album, from hardcore miniatures to synthesizer jolts to clattering one-chord jams and beyond. This latest self-reinvention was unavoidable—guitarist and texturalist-in-chief Bruce Gilbert quit after 2003's *Send*. ("One of Us," which opens this brisk 35-minute disc, is a kiss-off to a nameless collaborator, and an exception to the detached warnings that usually comprise their lyrics.) Now a trio of tough old guys, they've looped back to their late-'80s mode: dry, mechanical grooves topped with cooling-lava noise. Singer-guitarist Colin Newman has a sideline in electronic music, and this incarnation of Wire stacks up strobing patterns of rock instruments and voices the way techno producers use synthesizers. Even when Wire slow way down, their densely layered riffs reward wall-shaking volumes.
DOUGLAS WOLK
DOWNLOAD "One of Us," "Patient Flees," "Are You Ready?"

WOODHANDS
HEART ATTACK
★★★½
PAPER BAG
Canadian synth dorks wring laughs out of how much action they're *not* getting

Though they seem like the human equivalent of puppies, nerds are not always lovable. In fact, under the clunky glasses, they can be a bundle of seething rage and hateful desperation. The Toronto twosome Woodhands tap in to that inner sanctum, battering listeners' brain cells with a keytar and a drum kit. They turn the dirtiest secrets of geek life into wild-humored electro-rock aggression, and they definitely know what they're singing about—they probably started writing songs because their cable cut out halfway through *Battlestar Galactica*. The synthesized grunts and squeals of "Sailboats" sound like R2-D2 having angry make-up sex with a couple of lesbian Ewoks. "Dancer" has boy-girl vocals and agitated beats—when they bellow their dumb nightclub pickup lines ("You're a *very good* dancer! *What* is your name?"), they seem fully aware it's going to be a long drive home alone.
ROB SHEFFIELD
DOWNLOAD "Dancer," "Breaking Up" B

SLIPKNOT: PAUL BROWN; TORRINI: JON BERGMAN.

SCORE

CLASSIC 5★
GREAT 4★
GOOD 3★
MEDIOCRE 2★
FOUL 1★

ZZ Top just *love* a two-for-one pantaloons sale.

EXTREME MAKEOVER

HOW A CATTLE-DRIVING BLUES TRIO RULED MTV IN 1983 BY CHRIS NORRIS

ZZ TOP ELIMINATOR ★★★½ WARNER BROS.

When video killed the radio star, few imagined the survivors would look like this: thirtysomething roots rockers from the conservative state of Texas with 11 years together and more facial hair than England's whole new wave combined.

Fate's fickle wheel began turning when this Houston band set to work on *Eliminator*. Although they'd made seven albums in the hidebound style of blues rock, ZZ Top had been steadily refining their own spare, punchy, pop-oriented version. Using a peso for a pick, virtuoso Billy Gibbons coined a motorized guitar sound while bassist Dusty Hill and (confoundingly beardless) drummer Frank Beard forged a poker-faced rhythm section that could go 50 exits without stopping. After using synths on '81's *El Loco*, the band blended them with sequencers and Gibbons's signature "amp cabin" style of guitar mic'ing to create a densely layered, dance-beat-driven juggernaut whose spitting midrange sounded like an industrial-strength lawn sprinkler. No less a raw-power standard-bearer than Black Flag were soon playing *Eliminator* before shows on their '84 tour; singer Henry Rollins now declares in these liner notes, "The change of direction on *Eliminator* was one of the boldest and most successful moves a rock band ever made."

As the sound, so the vision. ZZ Top's guitar-solo groove sections were ideal for freestanding video narratives. And a ready stock of imagery (cheap sunglasses, pit-crew pimp wear, vintage American automobiles) primed the retooled band to cruise into the video decade, heralded by their unofficial fourth member: the customized red 1933 Ford coupe that gave this album its name and starred in the videos to "Gimme All Your Lovin'," "Sharp-Dressed Man" and "Legs."

Folklorists have debated what role ZZ Top play in those videos: Greek chorus? Hairy godfathers? A Southwest chapter of Funkadelic? Whichever, it's hard to recall a more indelible figure of '80s pop mythology than the three-headed power animal that beamed down into deserts and strip malls, bringing forth miniskirted muses, righting injustices and sending underdogs off to seek their dreams. Marrying gritty torqued-up sounds to Middle American morality tales, these videos turned the double-Z lightning-bolt key chain into a Jungian archetype, one that would reemerge in *Pulp Fiction* as the key Bruce Willis held to his vanquished foe's motorcycle—a decade later, still a gleaming talisman of freedom.

Though it was massive on TV, much of *Eliminator* strays from prime time's standards and practices. On one manic, nearly Hives-esque rocker, a variety-craving Billy Gibbons follows the title phrase "I got the six" with "gimme your nine" and later contributes rock's first recorded use of the phrase "spank my monkey." But even Cheech and Chong-ish gags like "TV Dinners" fail to obscure the solid musicianship behind all the smoke and bimbos, audible on the bonus-track recordings of rowdy shows in England. And on the second half of the DVD, a live TV performance from '83 proves that Gibbons and Hill could rock out in synchronized lockstep song after song. Even off the video screen, they were the same hard-working showmen whose flair for goofball gimmickry landed haystacks and cattle onstage in a 1975 tour.

Their video retrofit may have been state of the art, but the wry, folksy spirit that inspired it was as old as John Lee Hooker. And, remastered for its 25th anniversary, this strange, computer-assisted beast still has a palpable warmth at its center—nowhere more so than in their first Top 10 hit, "Legs," which, inside all that internal combustion, remains a strikingly tender love song. Even if they did write it about a car.

DOWNLOAD "Sharp-Dressed Man," "Gimme All Your Lovin'," "Legs" (original album version)

AARON RAPOPORT/CORBIS.

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS
BROTHERHOOD (THE BEST OF)
★★★½
ASTRALWERKS

Genius megastars of defunct genre age reasonably well

Eminem was right: Nobody listened to techno. Successful acts had to get over on bankable gimmicks: Fatboy Slim (wacky!), Prodigy (crazy!), Moby (Moby!). Ed Simons and Tom Rowlands sold themselves as fun-loving weird scientists, concocting a bright, booming mix of hip-hop break beats, trance whoosh and psychedelic-Beatles whimsy, with shamanistic cameos from rock singers like Oasis's Noel Gallagher or the guy from the Verve. This updates a great 2003 singles comp with a squelchy jam featuring potty-brained Baltimore rapper Spank Rock and four tracks from two recent albums that prove the Chems' formula is still durable eons after electronica went *pooft*. As bait, there's also a limited-edition version with a bonus disc of 10 "Electronic Battle Weapons" mixes—undiluted, club-oriented and joyously over the top, they hit like glow-stick beat downs.

JON DOLAN

DOWNLOAD "Block Rockin' Beats," "Setting Sun"

THE JACKSONS
DESTINY
★★★★
TRIUMPH
★★★
EPIC/LEGACY

Sunny roller disco and silky R&B that launched the King of Pop

In 1978, America's ultimate boy band declared its independence. Freed from the shackles of Motown (who retained the "5" in Jackson 5, as well as their superfluous sibling Jermaine), the Jacksons released their first self-produced album, *Destiny*, whose high-def funk and sophisticated balladry proved the adult brothers were a force to be reckoned with. Briefly. When Michael's *Off the Wall* hit a year later, it was clear that fine R&B arrangements like "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)" were mere demos for the more explosive music that powered the most astounding crossover act in history. As was confirmed by 1980's *Triumph*, whose ensemble call to unity, "Can You Feel It," found a much wider audience on another '80s landmark, *The Jane Fonda Workout*. But such were the ironies attending Michael's coming of age, captured on reissues where every falsetto chirp and hiccup augurs greatness—and fleshed out by four remixes by disco-era DJ John Luongo.

CHRIS NORRIS

DOWNLOAD "Blame It on the Boogie," "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)," "Everybody"

Jay Reatard: Man, Jonah Hill got *punk*!

LITTLE RICHARD
THE VERY BEST OF ... LITTLE RICHARD
★★★★★
SPECIALTY

All ye need know of rock & roll's sacred essence, in 25 tracks and 60 minutes

In 1956, when Macon, Georgia–born R&B wannabe Little Richard rammed the cleaned-up sex song "Tutti Frutti" into gear with the *awop-bop-a-loo-mop* that passeth all understanding, no one had ever heard music so frantic. Now, thanks to Little Richard, everyone has, so the tempos on this definitive distillation may strike the speed freaks he created as surprisingly poky. But the details remain his own. Marvel as Richard rushes to get ahead of himself on "Ready Teddy" and "Jenny Jenny." Figure out where the splices are as 57 seconds of "Keep A-Knockin'" turn into 2:14. Ponder his irrepressible desire to pound the piano faster than Jerry Lee Lewis pursued by a bear. Stomp your foot as Earl Palmer and lesser drummers drive a style forged in New Orleans. And above all, *ba-lomp-bam-boom*.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD "Tutti Frutti," "Keep A-Knockin'," "Long Tall Sally"

JAY REATARD
SINGLES 06-07
★★★½
IN THE RED

When he isn't beating up fans, this burly Memphis punk is actually a bit of a softie

Type "Jay Reatard" into a YouTube search and the site offers to finish your sentence with "punching fan." The guy who leaped onstage in Toronto and unplugged Reatard's guitar? He got punched in the face. The one who hurled a drink, angered by the sight of an acoustic guitar onstage? He got the guitar thrown at him, *then* he got punched in the face. Reatard, a high school dropout, has been making scrappy garage rock since 15, and this comp collects two years' worth of lo-fidelity 7-inch records. Throughout, yelpy clobberin' jams ("Blood Visions") and misanthropic screeds ("You give me, me the creeps," he sings on "Another Person") are shot through with a pop-loving sweetness. On the wistful "Hammer I Miss You," Reatard repeats, "Hold on to, hold on to, hold on to everything"—it's the most vulnerable moment here, and it hits like a fist to the face.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD "Hammer I Miss You," "I Know a Place"

RODRIGUEZ
COLD FACT
★★★½
LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

Mexican-American hippie who sang about crime and drugs in the tough city

Whose Detroit is this? Sixto Diaz Rodriguez—simply "Rodriguez" to both of his fans—issued a debut in the Motor City in 1970 and then disappeared. A long time later, that record made him a) a cult hero in South Africa and b) a construction worker in Detroit. The latest trippy oddball (after soul witch Betty Davis and tranquil folkie Karen Dalton) to get a high-profile CD relaunch by indie Light in the Attic, Rodriguez sounds like a coffeehouse serenader adrift after closing time. Motown studio musicians made the songs weirdly elegant and lent this cracked classic enough cheap synthesizer wheezes, trombones and inner-city psychedelica to earn its place in the freak-folk pantheon. Rodriguez was—*is*—a fake Dylan who got lost in his own head, kept taking left turns looking for the exit sign and ended up with something small and wonderful.

RJ SMITH

DOWNLOAD "This Is Not a Song, It's an Outburst: Or, the Establishment Blues," "Only Good for Conversation"

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THE BEST REISSUES FROM THE PAST MONTHS

U2
War
ISLAND

Hitting the battlefield with titanic moral and sonic force in 1983, U2 discovered how much "too much" is exactly enough.

The Best of **Bob Dylan**'s Theme Time Radio Hour Vol. 2
CHROME DREAMS

A treasure trove of obscure blues, soul and country gems favored by the wisecrackin'-est DJ on XM radio.

SCOTT D. SMITH/RETNA.

SCORE

CLASSIC 5★
GREAT 4★
GOOD 3★
MEDIOCRE 2★
FOUL 1★

World's lowest-tech Facebook page (clockwise from top left): Rachel Weisz, Adrien Brody, Rinko Kikuchi and Mark Ruffalo.

CON ARTISTRY

A STYLISH, ELABORATE TALE OF SIBLING SCAMMERS DOUBLES AS A CLEVER TAKE ON FAMILY TIES BY DAVID FEAR

THE BROTHERS BLOOM
★★★½
Directed by Rian Johnson
Starring Adrien Brody, Mark Ruffalo, Rachel Weisz, Rinko Kikuchi, Maximilian Schell and Robbie Coltrane

DIRECTOR RIAN JOHNSON'S *The Brothers Bloom* is the sort of elaborate game that young, ambitious filmmakers love to play with jaded audiences: Can I make you snicker at irony one minute, then sell you sincerity the next? It's a tough balancing act, but Johnson's tale of globe-trotting grifters deftly juggles art-house archness and earnest notions about the loyalty of blood relations. You know you're being taken for a ride, but you can't help admiring how well Johnson and his cast pull off the trick.

Ever since they were kids, the Bloom brothers—Stephen (Mark Ruffalo) and the younger one they simply call Bloom (Adrien Brody)—have excelled in the art of the swindle. With the help of a Japanese explosives expert named Bang Bang (*Babel*'s Rinko Kikuchi), they bilk rubes from Boise to Berlin until Bloom decides he wants out. Knowing his partner has an incurable romantic streak, Stephen chooses a kooky, comely female millionaire (Rachel Weisz) as their next target. Soon, the little brother and the intended victim have fallen hard for each other, unsavory characters start popping out of the woodwork and no one is sure who's playing whom for a sap.

Like *Brick*, Johnson's 2005 debut that transferred private-eye pulp to a high school setting, there's a showoff-y quality to *The Brothers Bloom* that falls somewhere between clever and self-conscious. The movie's dense set design, quirky supporting characters and soundtrack of deep album cuts will remind you of another director (hint: rhymes with *Schmes Schmanderson*), though unlike that auteur, Johnson is never overly precious and he knows how to ground the meta-movie touches. At the core of this loopy caper flick is a story about two brothers who know they've finally got to cut their codependent ties. The fact that the movie never loses sight of the emotional stakes is what makes *The Brothers Bloom* more than just a wink-wink romp and confirms that Johnson is a director worth keeping an eye on.

Sibling rivalries also fuel **RACHEL GETTING MARRIED** (★★★★), an ensemble drama from Jonathan Demme (*The Silence of the Lambs*) that turns a wedding into a grudge match. Recovering addict Kym (Anne Hathaway) gets a three-day pass from rehab to attend her sister's nuptials; she and the bride-to-be, Rachel (*Mad Men*'s Rosemarie DeWitt), immediately start tearing into each other. Not even a script peppered with wonky monologues can dampen Demme's funky, freeform handling of the material. His legendary gift for left-field musical touches—the film features everything from gypsy folk to an a cappella turn by TV on the Radio's Tunde Adebimpe—only adds to the giddy, oddball pleasure factor. It's easily Demme's best work in a decade. B

"I just rewatched **Superbad**. It reminds you what it's like to be a horny teenager just trying to impress girls enough to convince them to let you in their pants."—**Tommy Lee**

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

THE BROTHERS BLOOM: SLOBODAN PIKULA; LEE: SEAN O'NEILL/INFPHOTO.COM.

ILLUSTRATION BY AUGUST HEFFNER

TOOL MICHAEL JACKSON SEX PISTOLS BEASTIE BOYS LACUNA COIL FLEETWOOD MAC JIMMY EAT WORLD DINOSAUR JR. THE STONE ROSES VAN HALEN BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB DREAM THEATER JOE SATRIANI RADIO FUTURA NO DOUBT CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL THE GUESS WHO KORN AT THE DRIVE-IN BOB SEGER COLDPLAY LENNY KRAVITZ BILLY IDOL KENT FOO FIGHTERS JIMI HENDRIX THE DOORS JANE'S ADDICTION OASIS NOFX NIRVANA LOST PROPHETS THE EAGLES THE LIVING END BULLET FOR MY VALENTINE [illegible] TRUST WILLIE NELSON [illegible] SURVIVOR METALLICA [illegible] LINKIN PARK TED NUGENT [illegible] LABELS SOCIETY THE CULT PARAMORE [illegible] HOT 4 SYSTEM OF A DOWN OZZY OSBOURNE THE LIVING END ANOUK STEVE MILLER BAND BLINK-182 SUBLIME WINGS MOTORHEAD RISE AGAINST MC5 NEGRAMARO SILVERSUN PICKUPS BEATSTEAKS MARS VOLTA STEELY DAN REM THE ANSWER THE ENEMY BON JOVI MUSE INTERPOL LYNYRD SKYNYRD PAT BENATAR 311

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SCORE

CLASSIC 5★
GREAT 4★
GOOD 3★
MEDIOCRE 2★
FOUL 1★

THE AMAZING RACE

SPEED THROUGH AN L.A. DEVOID OF BUMPER-TO-BUMPER TRAFFIC–THIS MUST BE A VIDEO GAME BY LIBE GOAD

DWP: Driving while pixelated.

MIDNIGHT CLUB: LOS ANGELES
ROCKSTAR GAMES; XBOX 360, PS3
★★★★

THE LATEST INSTALLMENT of the *Midnight Club* franchise—in which you play a trash-talking East Coast upstart trying to break into the competitive Los Angeles street-racing scene—features sub-*2 Fast 2 Furious* acting. But you don't buy a game like this for Oscar-worthy performances. You get it so you can make death-defying leaps over the Pacific Coast Highway in your '69 Boss Mustang.

There's enough buying and tricking out of sexy cars and motorcycles to keep gearheads happy, but *Midnight Club* is mostly about cruising the well-rendered streets of L.A. and trying to outrace other speed freaks. The vehicles' physics are arcade-like, meaning players can pull off incredible hairpin turns and survive landings that would send any real-world ride directly to the scrap yard. Plus, there are cool power-ups that can stall rival cars with an electromagnetic pulse or slow time.

Log in to Xbox Live or the PlayStation Network while driving around and join up to eight drivers in head-to-head races or vehicular capture the flag. And fear not: Unlike in real life, when you cut off your fellow L.A. drivers, they can't shoot at you.

THIS *MAD MAX*-LIKE, go-anywhere do-anything role-playing game is as close as you'll get to living in a postapocalyptic world. Roam the wastelands of Washington, D.C., pitting different survivor factions against each other and engaging in brutal combat (weapons include mini-nukes!) amid stunningly rendered ruins and scorched mementos of 20th-century life. Just try not to lose your lunch while ordering a drink from the mutant bartender with half a face.

FALLOUT 3
BETHESDA SOFTWORKS; XBOX 360, PS3
★★★★

TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR
UBISOFT; XBOX 360, PS3
★★★

ARMCHAIR GENERALS CAN give their trigger fingers a rest with this real-time strategy game that eschews controller buttons in favor of an expansive menu of voice commands. The software understands the orders you bark into your headset with amazing accuracy; if only the cable company's automated-voicemail system worked so well! The plot—about a global war over oil—is a bizarre neocon fantasy, but we would expect no less from the mind of Tom Clancy.

FRANKLY, *NBA 2K9* isn't radically different from the 2K8 version. Beyond the updated team rosters, a handful of additions make buying this year's version of the b-ball sim worth it—among them are quarter-ending highlight reels and a new on-air team (Clark Kellogg, Kevin Harlan and Cheryl Miller) that keeps the witty banter flowing. And the game's improved player skin textures and eye movements approximate real life so well, it's positively unsettling.

NBA 2K9
2K SPORTS; XBOX 360, PS3
★★★½

LITTLEBIGPLANET
SCEA; PS3
★★★★½

THIS SO-CUTE-YOU'LL-HURL PS3 exclusive stars Sackboy, a pocket-size stuffed burlap dude who jumps, climbs and runs through obstacle courses consisting of household objects (wooden blocks, skateboards, etc.). Play through the fun, fantastical game solo or with up to three friends, then build new levels using a massive collection of shapes and textures; if you make a masterpiece, you can upload your design to share with gamers all over the big, big planet.

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BEST GAMES FROM THE PAST MONTHS

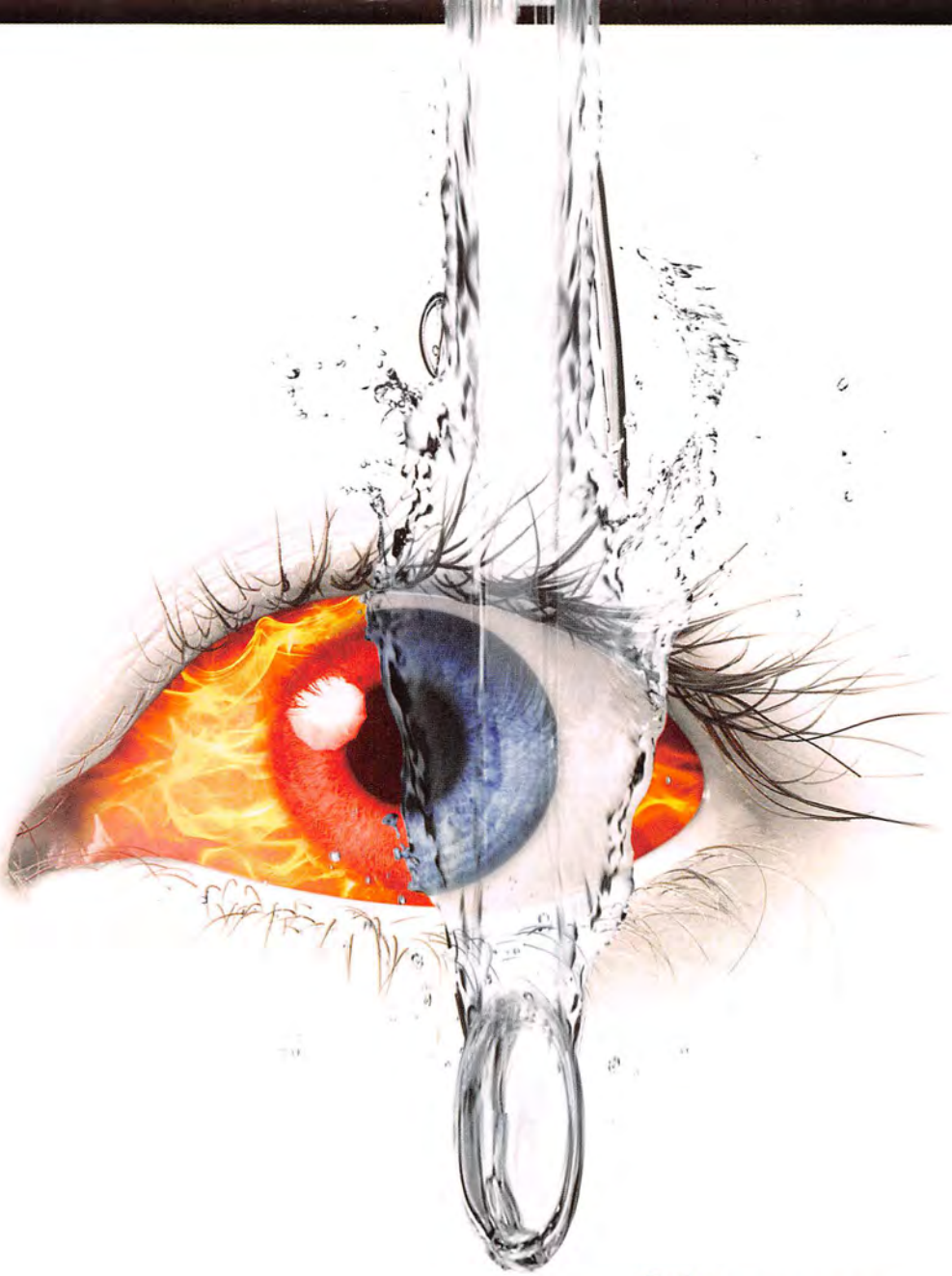
Madden NFL 09
EA SPORTS; XBOX 360, PS3

The game's holographic virtual-reality training environment makes this feel like *Madden* ... in ... *spaaaaace!*

Mercenaries 2: World in Flames
EA GAMES; XBOX 360, PS3, PS2, PC

The government of Venezuela has condemned this badass shooter, in which you hunt down a (fictional) Venezuelan dictator.

BLENDER (ISSN 1534-0554) Volume 7, Number 9, is published monthly with a combined issue in December/January by Dennis Publishing Inc., 1040 Ave. of the Americas, New York, NY 10018. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send change of address to BLENDER, P.O. Box 420234, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0234. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 503, RPO West Beaver Creek, Richmond Hill, ON, L4B 4R6. One-year subscription rates: For U.S. $15.94, for Canada $25.94, for all other countries $35.94 in prepaid U.S. funds. We sometimes make our subscriber list available to companies that sell goods and services by mail that we believe would interest our readers. If you would rather not receive such mailings, please send us a note with your current mailing label or address to: Blender Customer Service, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Printed in the U.S.A.



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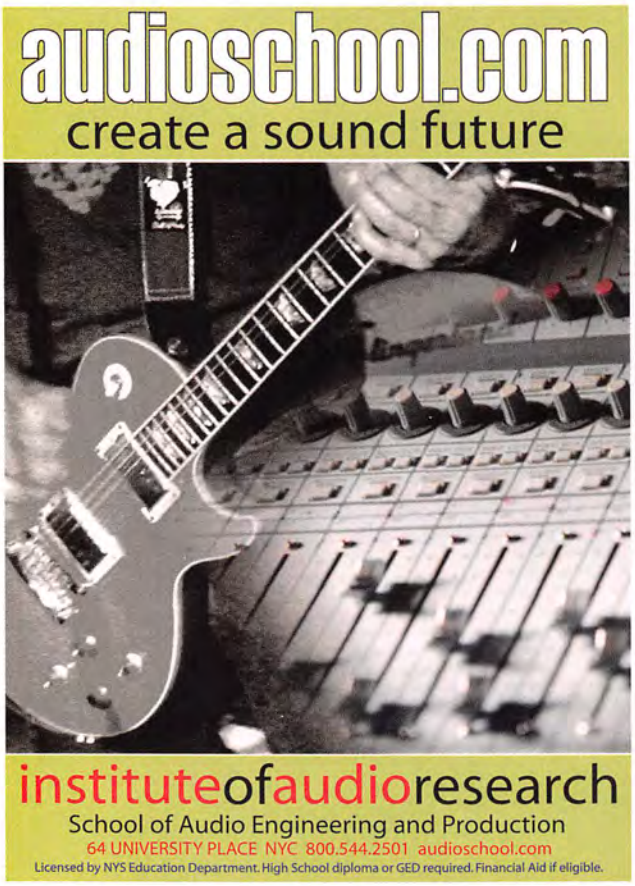

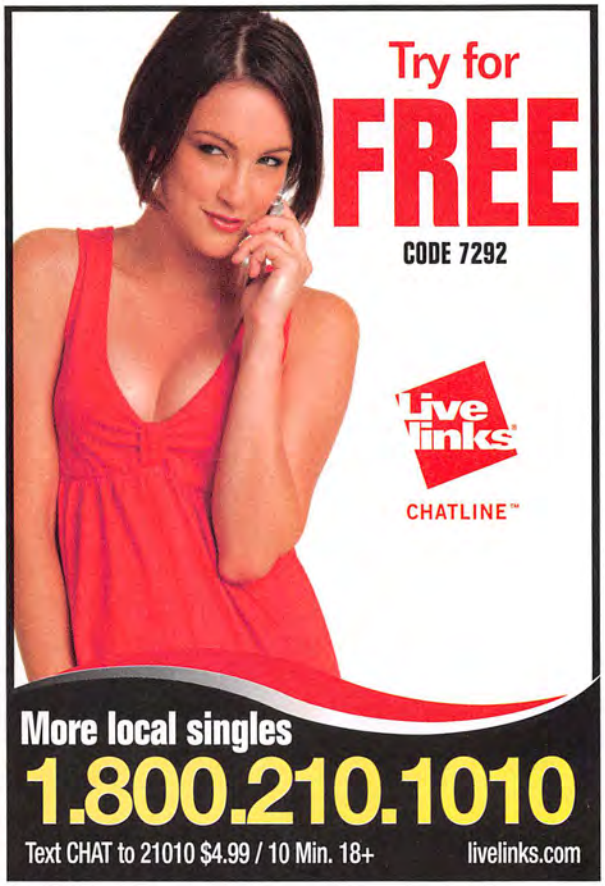

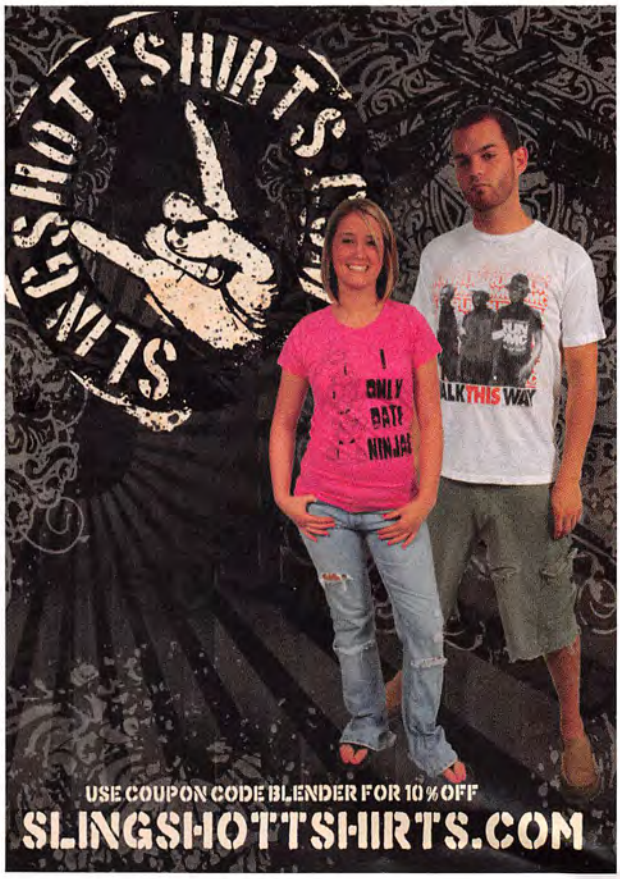

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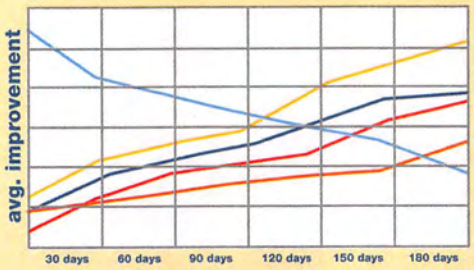

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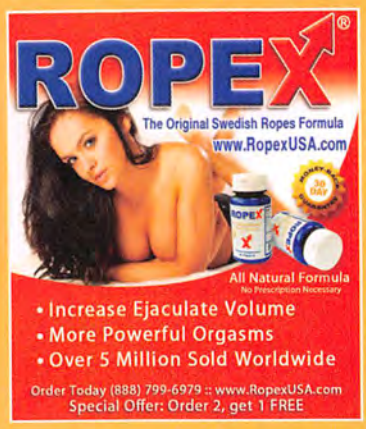

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Male Enhancement Pills . . .

Is it a Hoax or Do They Really Work?

Dr. Daniel Stein, M.D.

I wish I had a dollar for every patient or person that asked me over the last few years about increasing the size of "that certain part of the male body." The preoccupation with size that men have is a mystery to most women. The fact is it is completely normal for most men to want to be larger. It doesn't matter if they are smaller than average, average, or larger than average. It's even been my experience that guys that are almost too big, so big in fact that many women wont go near them with a ten foot pole (sorry about that) still want to be larger!

I was so intrigued by this fact that I started to do research about the "so called" male enhancement pills that came on the market several years ago. The concept that a simple pill could noticeably increase the size of a man's organ seemed plausible, but I wanted to know more. I had done much research over the years about certain sexually enhancing compounds available, so I believed the concept was sound that a pill could be made to make a man larger.

My first task was to look at some of the ads I had seen in magazines for male enhancement. There were some amazing claims by many of these makers. My personal favorite was a cream that claimed to make men instantly larger. I had to laugh out loud when I read what it said. The ad read, "apply cream, rub vigorously, increase your size." I thought for a minute and then decided you could put virtually anything on a man, including guacamole, and if he rubbed vigorously it would increase his size. Then there was an ad for a pill, that if taken daily, would increase the length of a man by 3 to 4 inches in just a few *short* days (sorry about the "short" comment).

I'm sorry, but after all those years of medical school, I know enough about anatomy to know that a guy who is 5 inches in length isn't going to add 3 to 4 inches to his little friend unless he buys a rope, gets a large brick, finds a bridge and...well, you get the picture. At about this time I was beginning to think that perhaps these makers hadn't found the magic mixture of compounds I had hoped they might have.

As the founder of both the Stein Medical Institute and the Foundation for Intimacy, I have spent most of my adult life trying to improve men and women's sexual health. I pride myself on being the best medical doctor I can be and my reputation is important to me. So, when out of the clear blue sky, I got a call from the makers of Extenze, the leader in male enhancement, wanting me to be in one of their TV commercials, I thought, "Boy, did they pick the wrong guy!"

"a pill that, if taken daily, would increase the length of a man by 3 to 4 inches."

Little did they know that I had done real research into this concept and had recently looked at some of these male enhancement products. But the makers of Extenze seemed to be genuinely convinced that their product really worked, and they claim to have sold over 100 million capsules to men all over the world. "Over 100 million capsules taken by men." With that single declaration, they had my interest. Either Extenze really worked or these guys were the world's greatest snake oil salesmen. So I requested that they send me Extenze formula so I could review it, then we would talk.

I then visited the Extenze.com web site, where I found a page that showed the top twelve adult film stars, all holding Extenze and endorsing it. I thought to myself, "Is it possible Extenze actually works?"

The next day I received the proprietary Extenze formula and there it was, virtually all of the ingredients that I hoped would be in a male enhancement product, 19 pharmaceutical grade nutraceuticals. There was Yohimbe (which used to be available by prescription only,) L-Arginine, Maca...all of it was there.

I contacted the makers of Extenze the very next day and asked them what they needed me for. They explained that they had a desire to have a medical doctor in their T.V. commercials to talk about the effectiveness of the ingredients in Extenze. At that moment an idea sprang into my head. I told them if they would let me improve the formula of Extenze, I would do the commercial for free!

Before I knew it I was working with their chemists at the manufacturing plant where we added the most revolutionary thing to the formula of Extenze. We added DHEA, also known as the "mother of all hormones." DHEA is the most important human prohormone and is the prohormone that converts into testosterone in men. DHEA levels decrease with the aging. Production peaks in a man's early 20's, and declines about 10% every 10 years. Low levels of testosterone can lead to low sex drive and a smaller sex organ.

"they claim to have sold almost a quarter of a billion capsules to men."

After a few more weeks of tweaking the formula of Extenze, we were done. The new Extenze formula has been selling even better then the old formula, with over 75% of sales to repeat customers. Extenze has been on the market for 7 years and has sold almost a quarter of a billion capsules to men all over the world. It doesn't matter if you're 18 or 80 years old. In my opinion Extenze can make you larger, harder and increase both your intensity and pleasure and it is as simple as taking a single tablet daily. Extenze is so sure it would work for anyone that they're sending out a free one-week supply of Extenze for nothing more then the cost of a postage stamp. You can contact them directly at 800-844-3938. I recommend any man healthy enough to engage in sexual activity should try Extenze. You have nothing to lose but a lot to gain. ★

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Who Does Josh Todd Think He Is?

BY JOSH EELLS **PHOTOGRAPH BY TIMOTHY DEVINE**

Your self-portrait says OUTCAST. Why?
My whole life, I've never fit in. I have a lot of imperfections—that's why I drew a dunce cap with stitches in it. And the X's are in my eyes because I used to be pretty fucked up.

Do you remember your first experience with alcohol?
It was magical. I was a bartender at one of my mom's weddings—I was like 13. I was drinking anything I could get my hands on. That was the beginning of an amazing 10-year relationship.

What kind of drunk were you?
A real asshole, especially to women. But I got clean after my first daughter was born, and I've been sober for 13 years.

What drug will you never do again?
Crystal meth. One time me and my buddy went on a three-day run, with no sleep. It was horrifying. I smoked so much pot and drank so much beer to try and come down, and I couldn't. I thought I was going to die.

How would you characterize your taste in sex?
This sounds gay, but I like to have a connection with my woman, get sensual. I'm not into getting bitten or smacked around. I'm a softie.

Ever doubted your sexual orientation?
I mean, I never *doubted* it. But I definitely experimented when I was younger.

You mean you kissed boys?
I never *kissed* a boy, no. I fooled around with a friend of mine one night when I was fucked up. It made me feel really uncomfortable, and that was the end of it. I knew I was straight. But I'm a pretty sexual guy. As soon as I started masturbating and felt what it was like to have an orgasm, it was on.

Are you a big pornography fan?
I've learned a lot from porn. It's like the Discovery Channel for humans.

What would exes say about you?
They might say I'm a jerk, or an asshole. Women are very mysterious.

What song brings you to tears?
Bonnie Raitt's "I Can't Make You Love Me" just wrecks me. "Hello Again" by Neil Diamond. I'm a sucker for a sad love song.

What's been the best day of your life?
Two: the day my first daughter was born and the day my second daughter was born. I look at women in a different way now that I have girls. I really respect them more.

Says the guy with a song called "Crazy Bitch."
"Crazy Bitch" is about when a girl just wants to go wild and get fucked. I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing, and I don't think a lot of women in this country think it's a bad thing.

Would you want your daughters to be crazy bitches?
Absolutely not. B

Todd gets a boost from personal assistant/security guard Bubba.

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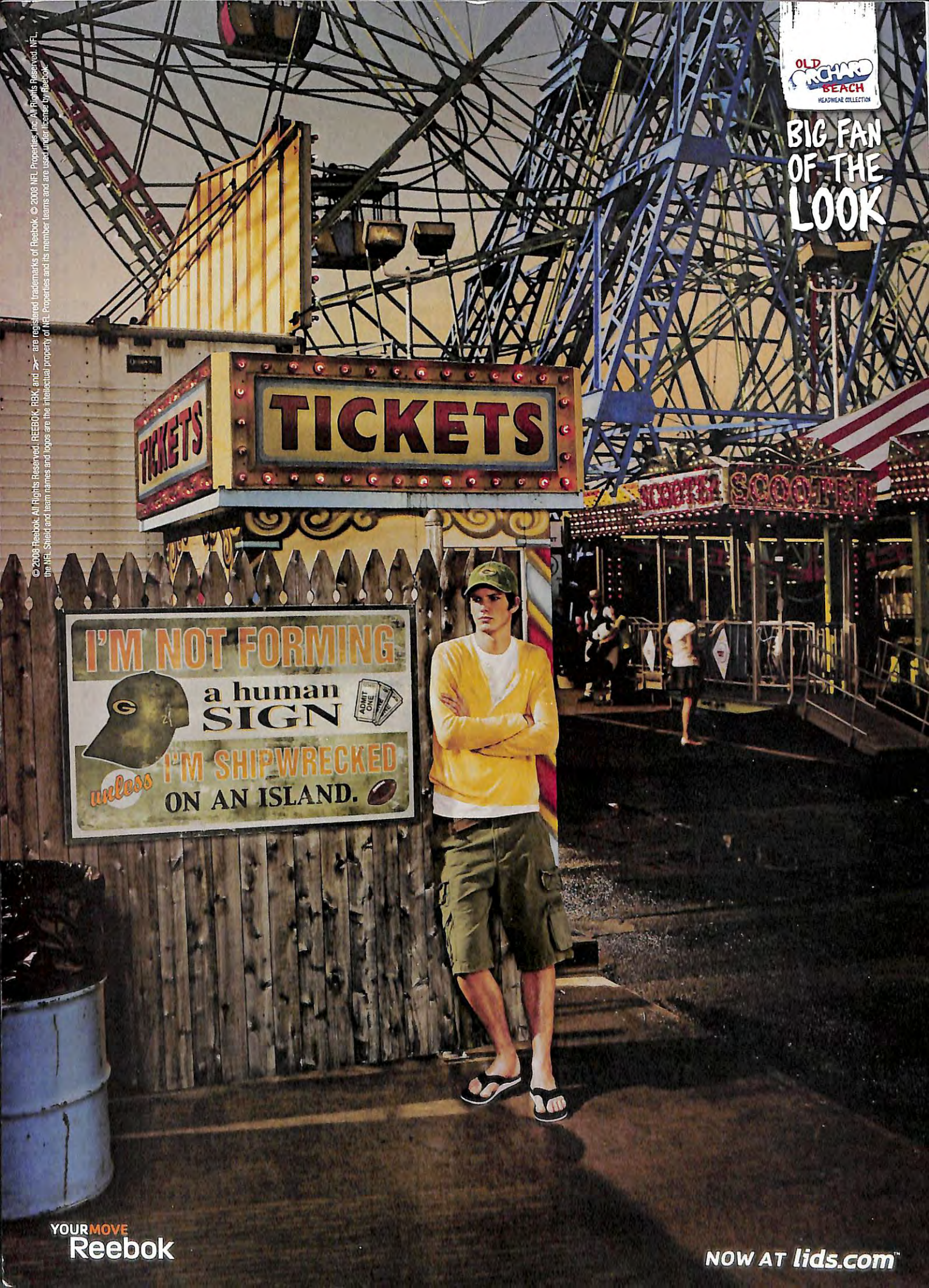

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